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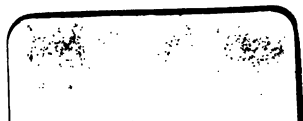
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FRONTISPIECE.

EL ST. CLAIR.

LIONEL ST CLAIR;

OR,

UNDER THE BANIAN TREE.

BY

L. A. MONCREIFF,

AUTHOR OF "HERBERT PERCY," ETC.



LONDON:

JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.

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yet, and cannot arrive for nearly an hour ; so that even were I to condescend so far as to obey your royal command instanter, I should still have a considerable time in which to exercise the rare virtue of patience before my respected brother could possibly present himself before me. You see, don't you, Ada ?”

“No, I don't see anything, except that you are very untidy and dirty. What have you been about this afternoon, to disarrange yourself so, as poor Mademoiselle would have said ?”

“Climbing trees, please your majesty, chopping wood, crawling upon rocks, wading in the water, grubbing in the sand—no offence, I hope.” And the dark-blue eyes, shaded by long black lashes, which looked up laughingly into her own, were so full of merriment and good-humour, that Ada could not but smile in return.

“Pretty well explained, certainly ; and pray, what became of your visit to Aunt Lily while you were so multaneously engaged ?”

“Spent an hour with her—capital fun too—nobody to disturb us. Aunt Lily is uncommon jolly up there ; but I say, Ada, why did not she come down to help papa to receive Tom ?”

“Because it did not suit her, I suppose,” re-

plied Ada, in a slightly altered tone, which did not escape Lionel's observation.

"Oh, I perceive," he said, "your majesty prefers doing the honours alone."

"Not at all," rejoined Ada. "Papa arranged it himself with Aunt Lily; but really, Lionel, I do wish you would go and dress. Papa will be quite put out if you are not here when they come. I know he meant both Eustace and you to go with Donald in the boat, and he is nervous at any rate. You should not be teasing."

"All right, my dear; don't you be afraid. I will be forthcoming without fail, armed with the brightest flashes of genius at my command. Here goes!" and with one spring, and a concluding shout of his chorus, Lionel cleared the terrace, and was half way up the stone steps leading to the hall door, at the top of the first flight of which he disappeared through a window which stood most conveniently open, while Ada followed by the more regular entrance, to ascertain for the last time that the fires were good, and all her various preparations for the expected travellers complete.

Half an hour later, she stood again upon the terrace. It was a beautiful and striking land-

scape that lay around and before her. An old castellated building, in the style of three hundred years ago, with jutting turrets and loophole windows, and yet sufficiently modernised to look cheerful and homelike, without losing anything of its characteristic picturesqueness, stood on a rocky height on the shores of one of those wide arms of the sea, the romantic beauty of which lends so great a charm to the boundaries of the west coast of Scotland.

Behind the castle, and only separated from it by a shrubbery and a grassy knoll, thickly wooded with larch and birch trees, and interspersed with a few stately old elms and beech-trees, rose a hill which gradually from this point attained to almost mountain height, and then stretched away on either side into ranges of lower hills, many of which were divided by deep chasms, distinguishable even at a considerable distance by the gushing streams, which, clear as crystal, sprang from rock to rock in waterfalls of sparkling foam.

Under a winter sky, the aspect of the scenery, notwithstanding its bold grandeur, might be somewhat rugged and dreary; but on this sweet, balmy evening, early in autumn, there was no trace of anything but the calm loveliness of

Nature. And yet, as Ada St Clair leaned over the parapet, and gazed on the prospect before her, every feature of which spoke to her of a young life's happy associations, she seemed to have lost sight of present objects ; and though her eyes were fixed upon the expanse of blue waters tinged with gold which lay stretched below the rocky shore, her thoughts were evidently far away, occupied with some subject of peculiar interest.

She was not, however, entirely alone. A little girl of between nine and ten years old, with long fair ringlets, and a bright innocent face, from time to time approached her sister, and then, finding no response to her attempts at conversation, bounded back to her father, who was seated on a rustic bench a few paces off. He was an elderly man, of singularly prepossessing countenance, to whom Ada bore but little personal resemblance, except in the regular contour of her features, and in the general air of high breeding which characterised both father and daughter.

Colonel St Clair had spent many years of his life in a foreign land, and though the effects of a southern climate had tended to weaken his health since his return, there was but little trace of the influence of a tropical sun in his still delicate

complexion and fair open brow, surmounted as it now was by silvery curls of soft luxuriant hair, which, hanging lightly round his head, and over the collar of his black velvet coat, gave him the appearance of being somewhat older than he really was.

"Any signs of the steamer yet, Ada?" he said at length, looking up from his newspaper as his daughter returned, for the third time, from the rising ground at one end of the terrace, where the view was open. "It is surely time now."

"Yes, dear papa, it is quite the time," she replied, "but I do not see it yet. I hear Donald below declaring that both wind and tide are against them, so that accounts for their being so late."

"Well, we must hope so, at any rate; but do not you give yourself cold, my darling, standing up there in the breeze."

"Oh no, papa, I am not at all afraid of that;" and Ada, seeing that her father had resumed his reading, walked once more to her post of observation, followed by little Emily.

It was an anxious moment for the family group at Eaglescrag Tower. This evening the return was expected of the eldest son and brother, after

a prolonged absence; and Mrs St Clair having died soon after he left home, it can well be imagined by every one who has had much experience of the vicissitudes of family life, how many emotions would be stirred up in the hearts of his father and sister by the prospect of his arrival amongst them.

Several years had passed since Thomas St Clair had gone forth from his Highland home, first as a mere boy to gain the dearly-bought experience of a midshipman's start in life, and then later, when his maritime tastes had considerably abated, for some unexplained reason, which had never been known beyond the domestic circle.

The loss of his wife, added to the departure of his eldest son, had been followed by a sudden resolution on the part of Colonel St Clair to give up the charge of his estate into the hands of trustees, and only to reside there occasionally, in accordance with their advice; but it was confidently expected by his younger children, as well as by the tenants and peasantry of the vicinity, that the return of the young heir would make a change in this arrangement, and that everything would now be put on the old footing.

Colonel St Clair, however, had made no men-

tion in his family of his intentions for the future. He had all along spoken of his eldest son with the most intense affection, and now that his arrival was hourly expected, seemed to be too much engrossed with feelings of personal tenderness to have any thought for more business-like considerations. Possibly it was a shade of disappointment at her father's silence that induced Ada to remain somewhat aloof from him while she watched for the first glimpse of curling smoke which should announce the approach of the steamer.

Before any such signal appeared, a clatter of feet and boyish voices within the house heralded Lionel's descent from his toilet, and next minute he and his brother Eustace, a boy about a year younger than himself, appeared on the steps.

Eustace ran to join his sisters, but Lionel sprang towards his father, and perched himself on the arm of the seat beside him.

"Well, my boy," Colonel St Clair said, throwing aside his newspaper, "so you are ready after all, thanks to the adverse tide?"

"Ah, but I knew all about the tide; Donald put me up to that. I was sure they would be late; but I wish they would come now. Papa,

isn't it jolly to have Tom really coming home at last?"

"Jolly? Well, I cannot say as to that. Jollity is more in your line than mine now-a-days; but the prospect is certainly very pleasant, notwithstanding all that has happened since he went away, poor fellow."

"Oh yes, I know. I did not think of that," said Lionel, rightly interpreting the shade of sadness in his father's tone, and the sigh which followed his last words. "But still, papa, it will be nicer for him to be at home. You know I never had a brother older than myself, and Tom is ten, nearly eleven years older than I am. Charley Seyton always talks so much about his elder brother; and now I shall have one too. I think it will be famous. I do hope he will not be too old to play cricket. To be sure, he has a wife; but she could hardly mind his doing that sometimes, unless she is awfully particular. What do you think, papa?"

Colonel St Clair laughed. "That is really beyond me, Lionel," he said. "I only know your brother was a capital cricketer in his schoolboy days."

"Oh, then I don't believe he has forgotten how

to play. I shall ask him, and about fishing too ; and, papa, I daresay he could help me about the fisher boys. You won't mind my asking him about that ?”

“No, dear. No, no ; ask him whatever you like. He will help you in such things better than I can, I have no doubt.”

“Oh, I did not mean that, papa,” Lionel answered quickly ; “only Tom must have been so much among fishermen and sailors, I thought he must know their ways, and between us we might manage something about the class. I could not do much, of course, but I might help with the younger ones, if Tom told me how.”

“Yes, I think you might ; and Ada too might be of use,” rejoined Colonel St Clair.

“Ada won't say. She is sure Tom will not like it ; but I do not believe she knows. She cannot remember very well, can she, papa ?”

“No, not at least in that way. The judgment of eleven years old is not generally very much to be depended upon ; and she was not above that age when she saw him last. You were scarcely six, I think.”

“Oh, well, she cannot know much, then. Nurse says he used to be very fond of teaching Eustace

and me ; but I don't remember it ; indeed I don't recollect himself very distinctly. I seem to confuse him with some one else ; the only thing I do remember is going out in a boat with him once to a ship. I suppose it must have been the steamer."

"That was on the morning he left home," said Colonel St Clair. "Ada and you went."

"And not you, papa?"

"No," was the reply, not impatiently spoken, but very gravely, and Lionel's flow of words became rather damped ; but next minute, his father turning towards him, and observing his look of surprise, smiled again, and said, "All right, my boy, you meant no harm ; only, I think we had better not speak of those days to-night : much happened then which you do not know of, and which is hard to look back upon ; and though God in His mercy has turned all to good, still I cannot dwell upon the retrospect—at least not now ; perhaps when we have Tom really among us, I may feel differently."

The expression of perplexity passed away from Lionel's countenance as he listened to these words, and with more readiness and tact than might have been expected at his age, he at once turned the

conversation into another channel, and, without further direct mention of his expected brother, kept up a merry talk over his adventures of the afternoon, till a loud shout from Eustace announced that the steamer was at last in sight.

This was the signal for both boys to spring down some rugged steps cut in the rock to the little cave where their boat was moored, and where an old Highland boatman was in waiting for them.

In a few minutes afterwards they were seen rowing fast to meet the steamer, which now came on at so rapid a pace, that they had to strain every nerve to reach the meeting point in time.

Meanwhile Ada, with her father and little Emily, stood on the bank above the terrace, watching all that passed with eager and anxious expectation.

CHAPTER II.

JEM'S EVENING WALK.

ABOUT the same hour that the steamer was rounding the point and becoming visible to the watchers on the shore, two lads were standing beneath the overhanging ledge of a rock, nearly half a mile distant from Eaglescrag.

Both were attired in sailor's garb, and from their mode of speech and general appearance, evidently sprang of peasant origin ; but the countenance of the elder and taller of the two was animated and intelligent, with a look of earnestness and reflection in his deep-set eyes and firmly closed mouth, which betokened a strong, manly character,—and he seemed at this moment to be deeply interested in the conversation he was carrying on with his companion.

"Well, Ned," he said, after a pause, during which the younger boy, with an exclamation of

impatience, had thrown himself down on the sand, "I have said about all I can ; you must see it is quite different for me. I did not choose the sea for myself, I was brought up to it from the first, and my father is here, and able to see to my mother, and they have Colin besides coming on. Your mother and little Kate have no one but you to look to."

"They can look to themselves," Ned replied, in no very dutiful tone. "What's to hinder them? My mother's strong yet, and Kate's growing fast;" then, as if half-ashamed of his roughness, he added, "I'm no going to forget mother because I'm away, and I'll be back in a year or so."

"Maybe," returned Jem ; "but there's no saying what a chap may forget, and, anyway, Ned, you and me have seen enough abroad to know that many a one who goes out never comes back."

"And what of that? It's just the same for you, man. I don't suppose your old folks would like any better than my mother to see the ship come into port without you." And Ned laughed.

The laugh, however, rather forced in itself, was not responded to ; Jem only looked graver than before.

"It's true, Ned," he said, "and many's the stormy night I've thought on it; but that's not the thing just now. I'm no feared for myself, nor for you neither, lad, if we go straight a-head, but Miss St Clair at the Hollow, and the minister, and the Colonel too, say that I had a hand in getting you afloat at the first, and I don't deny it; so I promised Mr Lionel I would say what I could to get you to give up and stop at home. It isn't for myself, Ned, for I would fain have you alongside; but it's to do what I promised, and for the sake of your mother."

"Well, you've done it now, then, and you can let the rest be; you mean well enough to me, Jem, I daresay, but I'll no bide on shore for you, nor mother, nor the lady neither, forbye the minister and the Colonel. It's all very fine for them to preach up to me that it's wrong to leave my mother, them living in their grand houses, and nothing to do but please themselves from one week's end to another. It's just to get me to stop and do their work for nothing, that's what it is."

"No, no, Ned, you don't think that," returned Jem, smiling; "there's nobody in the parish works harder than the lady, and Mr Morton too."

If you're set on being idle, you'll never get them to hold you up."

"I'm no more idle than you, but I'll not be set to cut down the Colonel's rotten old trees when I can get away over the water. So there's for you, Jem, and you can make of it what you please. I must be off now, or the old woman'll think I'm afloat already," and starting to his feet, without looking again at Jem, Ned clambered up the rocks, and was soon out of sight behind the brushwood that covered the face of the cliff.

Jem looked after him, a smile of amusement lighting up his sunburnt face ; then, softly whistling to himself, he pursued his way slowly along the shore, stopping from time to time to lift a pebble from the beach and throw it into the water, and scarcely observing in his abstraction how each rippling wave was bringing the flowing tide closer to his feet, and every moment making the pathway of dry sand narrower.

At last he reached a promontory of rock where the sand was completely covered, and the water of some depth, so that there was no way of proceeding dryshod, except by climbing over the lower ridge of the cliff, which at that point was quite impossible of ascent above.

The rocks were rough and irregular, and the spray of the rapidly rising waves were beginning to make them wet and slippery, but the sailor boy being a bold, expert climber, thought nothing of such difficulties, and, soon making his way from one point to another, was just about to leap down upon the sand, in a cove on the opposite side, when his attention was attracted by the splashing of oars not far off, and turning his head towards the spot whence the sound proceeded, he perceived the Eaglescrag rowing-boat coming towards the shore filled with people.

"It must be Mr Tom, surely, just arrived!" thought Jem to himself, and for a moment he hesitated as to what he should do. The only outlet from the cove below the rocks would lead him directly past the landing-place, and there was barely time for him to cross it ere the boat reached the shore, besides, he had caught a glimpse of little Emily's white frock near the steps, and he knew if she discovered he was there she would try to detain him; so, being naturally modest, and unwilling to put himself forward, Jem resolved to remain where he was till the arrival should be over, the rock upon which he stood being at a sufficient distance to admit of his

seeing all that passed without being himself observed.

With deep interest, therefore, he watched the scene, all the sympathies which from his earliest recollections had bound him to the house of St Clair making him feel as if he were himself concerned in the crisis of this day. The boat came quickly on, Eustace St Clair and old Donald rowing, the former with his jacket off and his cheeks flushed with the exertion and excitement, while Lionel stood in the centre of the boat beside a tall figure whom Jem rightly guessed to be the anxiously expected stranger, Thomas St Clair.

For some minutes nothing but the general appearance of the latter was discernible, but as they approached the shore he took off his hat, and the last rays of the setting sun fell upon his fine open brow, manly features, and profusion of light hair. Long afterwards, when the experience of years had led Jem into much close contact with both brothers, he loved to recall the look of gentle kindness with which he saw the elder turn to the younger, and the half-enthusiastic, half-tender manner in which Lionel responded, looking up with his frank boyish face bright with pleasure,

and his hand resting lightly on his newly-found brother's shoulder.

So struck was Jem by the sight of these two, that he scarcely observed the graceful form of the young wife who sat in the stern of the boat, gazing with admiring eyes on the scene of beauty opening before her, nor even the sleeping babe whose little head lay nestled on her shoulder.

Emily, however, at the foot of the steps, was anxiously taking note of each one of the party; and when at last the boat entered the cove, its keel grating upon the gravelly beach, her first exclamation was, "Oh, there is a baby! do bring it out, Lionel, and let me take it to papa!"

But before her wish could be accomplished, the little maiden herself was caught up in a pair of strong arms, and a voice, so like her father's that even then she observed the resemblance, said, "And are you really Emily, my baby-sister? Well, this is coming home indeed!"

They were simple words, but pleasant ones to linger on the ear, as the first that fell from the lips of a new friend, and as such they were never forgotten by James Douglas. It was nearly all that he heard, for in the bustle of landing, and

getting the lady and child safely out, not much was said; and in a few minutes Lionel had hastened the whole party up the ascent to the terrace, where, with open arms and loving words of welcome, the father was waiting to receive his greatly valued son.

Then Jem sprang down from his resting-place, and pursued his way along the beach to his cottage home, where he felt he should create even more sensation than usual with this unexpected news to impart.

A quarter of an hour's quick walking brought him to the opening of a ravine, between the steep banks of which a clear little stream had its course, leaving room on one side, among the loose stones and sand, for a tolerably wide though somewhat rough pathway.

Up this path Jem strode, whistling merrily as he went, for about a hundred yards; then suddenly turning to the right, he ascended some wooden steps, and his home stood before him, a rustic cottage thatched with furze and heather, sheltered behind by a high cliff and a clump of fir-trees, and adorned in front by the brightest and neatest of little gardens, which at first sight looked almost as if it were suspended among the rocks,

so great a contrast did it present to the surrounding scenery.

As Jem approached in the twilight, he perceived his father, an elderly fisherman, sitting on a bench outside the door mending a net, while beside him, with an open book in his hand, stood a little boy of about seven years old, evidently endeavouring to master some lesson; but at the sight of his brother he gave a shout of joy, and throwing down his book, sprang towards the steps to meet him.

"Well, Jem, my lad," said the father, laying aside his net with an air of satisfaction, "so you've got back. It's a grand night."

"Splendid, father," replied Jem, turning round once more to look at the moon just rising over the sea. "I didn't mean to have stopped so late; but I couldn't help it. I hope you haven't been wearying for me."

"No. I was well content watching the sun go down; but it is a glad sight to see you too—it'll no be for long, I'm thinking."

"No, no, not for long," echoed the mother, appearing in the doorway, a trim cleanly-looking woman, some years younger than her husband—"You're just home and away again, laddie—it's terrible."

"Never heed about that, mother," said Jem cheerily, as he entered the cottage and hung up his glazed hat on a peg above the door. "I'm here to-night, anyway, and mind I'm awfully hungry. Is the supper ready?"

"That it is; ready waiting on you this good while—now, Colin, you pick up that book, and come in this moment; come away, father." And John Douglas and his little boy having obeyed the summons, the whole party sat down in the mingled light of the peat fire and the harvest moon, to enjoy their simple meal.

"I saw Ned Harding to-night, father," said Jem, when, his hunger being somewhat appeased, he began to be anxious to relate his adventures.

"That's well. Did you get any chat with him to get him to do better?"

"I can't say; he let me speak, but that was about all; his mind seems set upon going."

"He's a wilful laddie," said Mrs Douglas. "You'd best let him be, Jem."

"No, no, wife," rejoined her husband, "Jem's in the right; it was along of him that the boy was led from his home at the first, and the least he can do is to try to break him off. It isn't like you, wife, to pay so little heed to

the trouble of the poor widow and the fatherless bairn."

"Maybe I'm wrong, John," said Mrs Douglas ; "it's true, I was forgetting poor Nelly, and Katie too, poor bit lamb ; but for the rest, I canna see why Ned should be worse off at the sea than our ain laddie here ; he's strong enough."

"Oh yes, mother !" said Jem, "it isn't that ; but you see he's for ever after sprees, and that gets him into mischief."

"Oh, ay ! they're terrible hard on you lads on board them ships," was his mother's reply.

John Douglas laughed—"It's plain where mother's thoughts are, Jem," he said, "so we'll let Ned alone, while we finish our supper."

"Oh, but I've better news than that, father !" said Jem, "news that mother won't quarrel with. Mr Tom's come home ; he got to the Castle just as I crossed the cove."

"Mr Tom ! young Mr St Clair ! O Jem ! and did you see him ?" And all thoughts of poor Ned Harding and his misdemeanours were immediately lost sight of in the excitement roused in Mrs Douglas by this important intelligence.

Jem very willingly told his tale, to the great delight and surprise of his auditors, only lessened

on little Colin's part by a very vehement expression of his wish that he had been present too.

"Now, mother," he began, "if ye'd only let us go when I asked ye;" but his mother was far too much engrossed with the story itself to give her usual attention to his remonstrances.

"Well," she said, when Jem had told all he could, "it's a great blessing to have him back when we thought he was maybe lost, and we would never see him mair. Dear me, it seems but like yesterday that he went away last to the sea!"

"That was when you were up at the Castle, mother, wasn't it?" said Jem.

"Ay, when your father was away, and you down by at your grandmother's. I mind it so well; the Colonel and the mistress had been nearly a year home then, and wee Miss Emily was just born. I was sitting in the nursery with her on my knee—she wouldn't be above a month or two old—and Mr Lionel, the bonniest laddie ever I saw, was building houses on the carpet with his bricks. I dinna mind where Eustace would be, but I know in came Mr Tom, no laughing and lightsome as he had aye been before when he left us, but quiet and dull-like; and he never spoke

to Lionel, though he had a great work with him from the first, and just sat down by the fire and looked at the bairn ; and then I saw two great tears gathering in his eyes, and he said, ' Well, Mary, you 'll get rid of me now for good ; I 'm off to Australia.' I 'll never forget the turn he gave me, and sure enough he was away before many weeks were by. And six months after, his mother was gone too. So the Colonel had trouble enough, poor man. I hope he 'll get some comfort now, to make up for all that 's come and gone."

" They say, though," said John, who had been gazing intently into the fire while his wife was speaking, " that he doesn't mean to bide here yet all the year round."

" Do they say that ?" said Mrs Douglas. " Oh, he 'll change his mind, now Mr Tom 's home."

" Well, I hope so," returned her husband, " but no doubt we 'll hear in a little time what is to be ; let 's leave it to-night. Jem, my lad, hand me down the Bible, and we 'll have our reading, and then to rest ; I 'm tired."

Wild and sweet sounded the psalm of praise as it rose amid the stillness of that rocky corner, and not less touching were the deep full tones of the

father's manly voice, as he read out of the sacred volume, and then in a few simple words of prayer commended himself and his family, and all dear to them, to the protection and guidance of the Good Shepherd.

Jem, who had spent but few nights under his father's roof since his return from sea, seemed much impressed by the earnestness which pervaded the whole of the little service. And when, an hour later, he stood in the homely loft which served him as bedroom, and looked through the small window upon the moon-lit waters he loved so well, amid many pleasant reminiscences of his wanderings, the feelings of the moment gained the ascendancy ; and it was with soft and soothing thoughts of home and his father's house, that he retired to rest, and forgot all that day's events in a sound sleep.

CHAPTER III.

AUNT LILY.

A WEEK had passed—a week of skies so unclouded, and sunshine so brilliant, that, considering the rarity of such weather in those northern localities, it seemed almost as if Nature had made a special effort to hail the traveller's return.

Signs of autumn, indeed, began now to be more apparent: the swallows disappeared, day by day, the heather grew brown, and, notwithstanding the splendour of the days, the variegated hues of the trees, and the occasional falling of the leaf, gave unmistakeable evidence of morning and evening frosts.

On a sheltered lawn, however, in the foreground of a little villa, which stood on a rising bank overlooking a retired bay, about two miles from Eaglescrag, there was as yet but little trace of the changing season. Protected from the north

winds by a rocky height, and surrounded by luxuriant evergreens and a low wall, the garden of Woodbank Cottage still bloomed with the bright colours of verbena and geraniums, and abounded in the fragrance of mignonette and sweet-peas, and even a few choice and late flowering roses. Few passers-by failed to cast a look of pleased admiration through the green gate, or over the hedge of sweet-brier, which, rising above the wall, divided the lower end of the garden from the lane which led along the beach.

The cottage itself was long and low, with two bay-windows at either end, round which were twined creeping plants of roses and jessamine, the long tendrils of which made their way over the roof, and nearly reached the projecting windows above.

A broad gravel walk divided the house from the soft green bank which sloped down into the middle of the garden, and below which, interspersed with grass walks, the gay flower-beds were tastefully laid out.

From the height of the ground on which the cottage stood, it commanded a very pretty view of the sea, and of the blue mountains rising up beyond it; and this view the possessor of the

little domain seemed greatly to enjoy, for at one of the bay-windows which was open, sat, on this September afternoon, an elderly lady at work.

It only required a glance at her countenance to recognise her as the sister of Colonel St Clair. There was the same delicacy of complexion, the same soft blue eyes, and, though less remarkable for regularity of feature, there was even more of sweetness and placidity in this lady's peculiarly happy expression.

The effects which earth's trials leave behind them, might indeed be traced even amid the brightness of the smile, which, from time to time, played upon her lips, as she pursued her own thoughts, or, looking out, gave a kindly nod of recognition to the little barefooted children, who occasionally paused at the green gate, and thrust their curly heads through its bars, to take a longing peep at the pretty garden ; but still, from her whole aspect and demeanour, it was very evident, that whatever may have been her life's history, hers was a peaceful and happy lot now—the lot of a cheerful, contented spirit, made glad by the peace which passeth all understanding.

The shadows were beginning to lengthen, and the air from the window becoming sharper, ere

the silence in the room was broken by a neat little maid's entrance, inquiring very anxiously when her mistress would wish to have tea.

"Not quite yet, Eliza, thank you," replied the latter; "but you may have it ready." And when the little maiden had retired, quite satisfied with the reply, Miss St Clair folded up her work, and rose from her seat to shut the window.

Before she had done so, however, the sound of a merry laugh struck upon her ear, followed by rapid footsteps running down the path at the side of the cottage, signs which fully prepared Aunt Lily for the sight of Lionel and Eustace bursting round the corner of the house.

"I've done it! I was first!" said Lionel, leaping up at the open window. "We have run all the way from the top of our own hill. Aunt Lily, do say I was first!"

"I saw you first, at any rate. Will that do?" said Aunt Lily, smiling, as she fondly embraced both boys. "But, my dears, you must not overheat yourselves. Eustace is quite out of breath."

"Oh, that is nothing, Auntie," returned Eustace, "I could have run ever so much faster, only the grass on the hill was so slippery; and Ada would make me wear my new boots."

"Oh! well I don't think there has been any want of speed, to judge by this wild hair, and these bright cheeks. You must come in and rest, and have some of my tea to refresh you."

"That's the thing," said Lionel, effecting an entrance by the window, while Eustace went round more quietly by the door. "Nobody makes tea like you, Aunt Lily."

"This is famous," he went on, when, a few minutes later, the trio were seated at a round table in the bay window. "It was so jolly of you to have it all ready, Auntie. We dined early to-day, because papa and Tom have gone over to Mr Seyton's; and Julia and Ada have some mysterious doings of their own on foot—apple jelly, or something—so we deemed it best to make ourselves scarce."

"Yes, Aunt Lily," Eustace joined in, "and papa told us to say he hoped you would come up to Eaglescrag the day after to-morrow, to dine, and stay all night. It is little Arthur's birthday, and he thought you would like to see him."

"Certainly I should, dear little fellow. I shall be very glad to come. Are you going to have a party in his honour?"

"No, no party. Isn't it a pity, Aunt Lily,"

said Lionel. "Arthur is such a rum little chap. I was sure everybody would like him ; and I wanted papa so much to give the tenants a treat on the grass that day. They have not had any this year, and it is warm enough still for that if we had it early enough in the afternoon ; but neither papa nor Tom would hear of it, and Julia looked really angry. I quite expected she was going to scold me, Auntie. I do not know why."

"And the people would have been sure to like it," added Eustace. "Not that I care so very much about that, but still it would have been some fun ; and as Master Arthur is Tom's son, why should he not be welcomed as the heir ?"

"Oh, papa did not say anything about that," said Lionel quickly, before his aunt could speak ; "he only told me Tom and Julia did not wish it."

"Oh yes, that was all he said to you ; but I heard him talking to Tom about it in the yard this morning, when I was in the stable, saddling my pony ; and I saw quite plain that they did not want a fuss made about Arthur. I could not think what they meant, unless the little chap is delicate ; and I am sure he looks quite well."

"Well, never mind, my dears, what they meant, or whether they meant anything. I have no

doubt they are right to take things quietly. Arthur is only a baby, and no one knows what the future may bring."

"But, Aunt Lily," said Lionel, "in that way you would never keep birthdays at all, because nobody can tell how long they may live, whether they are old or young."

"Yes, dear boy, I would keep birthdays; but in doing so I would try to think more of the past and present than of the future. Tom and Julia and all of us cannot be too grateful for having their little Arthur; but if they can refrain from indulging, or rather from resting too many certain hopes on his fragile little life, I think they may be doing the best and happiest thing for their own enjoyment, and also for his and their good."

"Oh, well,—if that is what they mean," said Lionel, in a tone expressive of considerable doubt upon the point, "I think perhaps Tom may be thinking of that."

"I daresay he is. But come, tell me what you think of your new brother and sister. You know I have scarcely seen you since they arrived."

"Oh, Tom is famous, Aunt Lily," replied Lionel, his eyes brightening; "I could not say

enough about him. He is just the very nicest fellow I ever saw."

"And his wife—do you like her?" said Miss St Clair. "I thought she looked very pleasant in the few minutes I saw her."

"She is very nice indeed," said Eustace, in a most decided tone, which seemed to imply an expectation of being contradicted. "Ada and I both think so, and so does papa."

"And does Lionel dissent from that opinion?" said Aunt Lily, smiling, as Lionel handed her his empty tea-cup, with an air of grave consideration.

"Not exactly, Auntie," he answered, after a few minutes' pause. "I do think her manner is very pleasant, and she is gentle and merry, and all that; but yet somehow I cannot make her out quite. I always feel as if there was something about her not just the same as what she appears; but that may be only my fancy. I don't know much about ladies and their ways—at least not that kind; and Julia has not spoken very often to me yet."

"Ah, that's it, Aunt Lily," said Eustace. "Dame Julia has not paid sufficient attention to Sir Lionel to satisfy his knightly dignity."

"What do you say, Leo? is Eustace right?" said Miss St Clair, stroking Lionel's cheek, as his colour slightly rose at his brother's words; but he did not look in the least ruffled, and said quite quietly—

"No, Auntie, I don't think so—at least, not altogether. Of course, when Julia has been longer with us, I may like her better, and get to understand her rightly; but I did not expect her to talk much to me at first, and what I meant about her generally had nothing to do with that. It was only my idea. I would not have said it to any one but you, Aunt Lily."

"There is no harm done, dear child. Only you may change your mind by and by, when you are all better acquainted. These are early days."

There was so much of child-like simplicity, blended with a considerable share of manly reflection, in Lionel's tone and manner, that his aunt could not for a moment doubt his sincerity; but as the conversation seemed to be in danger again of becoming too personal, she tried to divert the boys' attention by an inquiry after the progress of their studies.

"Are you still going on with Mr Morton?"

she said, "or do the Greek verses fancy they have got beyond him now?"

"Oh no, we could not soon do that," Eustace answered; "we go to him every morning still; but papa says he must send us to school now, which is a most horrid idea of his."

"I don't know that," said Lionel. "School might be very good fun. I should not mind it a bit, if only we are not sent too far away."

"Oh, for that matter, if we are to go, I hope we shall go to England at once. The schools there are far the best. I always heard that; and Julia says it is quite true."

"True for her, I daresay," rejoined Lionel, "though how she has discovered the fact out in the Bush, I don't exactly see. However, be it so. She can send Arthur off to the south whenever she is so disposed; but a Scotch school is quite good enough for me. Isn't it, Auntie?"

"That depends on wiser heads than yours or mine, Leo, I fancy," replied Miss St Clair, who, being well aware of the different inclinations of her two nephews, and perhaps knowing more than they imagined of the plans and intentions regarding them, prudently refrained from giving any further opinion.

The discussion, however, went on very eagerly without any assistance of hers, the ready wit and shrewdness of both boys being at no loss for fancied arguments of the most profound wisdom ; and Lionel, who had left the tea-table, and perched himself on the back of his aunt's sofa, while Eustace lay at his full length on the rug at her feet, was discanting with great eloquence upon the advantages of his own side of the question, when the sight of some figures passing along the lane cut him short, and brought him with a flying jump to the window.

"Yes, it is ; I was sure of it," he exclaimed ; "it is Ned Harding. Then Ada was wrong, and he has not gone yet. I wonder if Jem Douglas is with him. I see a lot of fellows standing about on the rocks."

"Oh, I daresay he is," said Eustace, who, though silent, had started up, looking quite as much interested as his brother ; "I will run down to the gate and see."

"You had better not," returned Lionel ; "now I see them more plainly, I don't think Jem is there ; and if he isn't, Ned's safe to get you into a scrape ; you know that, old fellow."

Miss St Clair was about to add a gentle remon-

strance to Lionel's playful warning, but Eustace only laughed, and ran out of the room. Next moment he was seen springing over the garden fence.

"He should not have gone, Aunt Lily," said Lionel, presently, in a dissatisfied tone. "Papa does not like us to go with Ned when he has his own friends with him."

"Does he not, dear? I do not think Eustace will stay when he knows that. See, there he is, coming back already."

And Eustace it certainly was, retracing his steps up the bank; but he stopped before he reached the window. Lionel opened it, and then called to his brother to come in; but instead of doing so, Eustace stood still, and said, "Will you come, Leo? I am just going along to Ned's cottage, to look at some nests he found on the crags to-day. He says they are the largest he ever saw."

"No, I am not coming; it is a long way to Ned's cottage, and I don't want to go; and besides, Tom said he would perhaps come here this evening, and I should like to wait for him."

"Oh, he won't come," returned Eustace, a

slight frown contracting his dark eyebrows ;
“there’s no good in your waiting here.”

“Are you sure you had not better wait yourself, Eustace ?” said his aunt. “I thought Ned had companions with him.”

“Oh, they have gone away. I often go with Ned, Auntie ; it is all right, I will not be late. Good-night.”

And off he went again, taking no heed of Lionel’s loud shout of “Well, take care what you are after, that’s all.”


After a silence of about five minutes, during which time Lionel stood with his head stretched out of the window as far as he could reach, in hopes of following Eustace’s movements with his eyes, he at last drew it in, and shutting the window, returned to his aunt’s side. “Beg pardon, Auntie. I hope you are not cold ; I was only trying to see something, but it is of no use ;” then kneeling down, and looking up playfully in her face, he went on, “Now, I don’t think Tom can be here for a good while, may I get down those pretty things ? You know I have not seen them all this summer.”

“Not tired of pictures yet ?” returned Miss St Clair, patting his head ; “yes, you may get them,

certainly ; but what will your brother say to find a tall fellow like you enjoying the same books he delighted in himself at six years old ? ”

“ Oh, Tom will not think anything about it at all. I am sure no one could ever be tired of pictures like those, even if you had not done them, Aunt Lily,” and Lionel as he spoke arranged two large oblong-shaped books, bound in embossed silk, on the table, and proceeded with great caution to turn over the leaves.

In the one which he opened first were a series of water-colour views of different points of scenery in the British Islands, chiefly in Scotland and Wales. They were delicately and exquisitely finished, and displayed great taste, both in the selection and in the execution. In former years Miss St Clair had had opportunities of travelling a great deal, both in England and Scotland ; and with a natural genius for drawing, such as few possess, she had cultivated the talent by constant exercise, till, with scarcely any advantages of teaching, she had attained to a considerable degree of perfection. Thus, when more lately her domestic habits were necessarily changed, she had




and it one of her greatest resources and recreation to work up her sketches one by one into

larger pictures, and so to recall more vividly the scenes which were associated in her mind with so much of the happiness of her youth.

The book, however, over which Lionel was now poring, contained the original sketches as they had been taken, and he, having much of his aunt's artistic taste, considered it one of his choicest treats to look through them from time to time, and to hear again and again the incidents connected with each.

There were few hours Aunt Lily prized more than those spent in watching the unfolding of her nephew's fresh young mind, as he made his boyish attempts at criticism of the drawings, and remarked freely on the characters and actions described in his aunt's narrations from real life.

And not less did Lionel enjoy this intercourse, coming as it did but seldom, more especially when he turned to the second set of drawings, which he always kept for the last, and dwelt upon the longest. They consisted of a series of likenesses, some in chalk and others in watercolour, of different members of Miss St Clair's family; and these were so arranged as that opposite each, on the corresponding page of the book, was an illustration of some scripture incident, either adapted,



as the artist had fancied, to the characters of the originals of the portraits, or, in most cases, merely connected with them by some link of association in her own mind.

The pictures, in both their aspects, seemed to possess a peculiar fascination for Lionel, increased, perhaps, by a shade of mystery which he always imagined to pervade the adaptation of the illustrations; and there was one, in particular, which, on this account, never failed to rivet his attention. It came last of all in the book, and was the likeness of a youth in the early prime of manhood. He did not seem to have been above one or two-and-twenty when the picture had been taken, and his face, handsome and intelligent, was full of the brightness of hope and lightheartedness, and beaming with life and spirit.

On the opposite page, presenting what appeared a striking contrast to this portrait, was a touching illustration of the parable of the Prodigal Son; and often as he had seen it before, over the representation of the returned wanderer approaching his home, and meeting his father, for several minutes, this evening, Lionel pondered in silent thought.

"Aunt Lily," he said at last, "you once pro-

mised to tell me some day, why you put this picture opposite Uncle Lionel's; do you remember?"

"Perfectly, my dear; and I will keep my promise, but scarcely this evening. I think the time has not come yet when you could quite understand it."

"Has it not? Well, I understand a good many things, and I should not think that could be very difficult. But never mind, Auntie, if you had rather not. Perhaps I should not care so much for the picture if I knew all about it."

It was with a somewhat sad smile that Aunt Lily looked up, and said, "Perhaps not, darling, there is no saying; but, Lionel, I will tell you one thing that first put the idea in my head,—it was seeing my brother Lionel trying to draw this very scene when he was quite a little boy, and my mother had been telling the story to him and me."

"Oh yes; and then you remembered that afterwards. Then Uncle Lionel was fond of drawing?"

"Yes, very. Perhaps, some day, I will show you some of his sketches," replied Miss St Clair; and she was going on to say more, when a

quick, firm step was heard on the gravel, and Lionel sprung up to open the door for his brother.

Before he reached it, however, the handle turned, and a manly voice said, "Any admittance for the ancient mariner?"

This allusion to an old family joke elicited a merry laugh from Lionel, and a cheery response from his aunt, and speedily were pictures and work alike forgotten, as the long-absent nephew took his old favourite seat in the corner of the bay-window, and looked round admiringly upon all the well-remembered objects.

Miss St Clair's pleasure in once more seeing him there was of no ordinary kind. Even Lionel and Eustace, dear as they both were to her, had never been able to fill up Tom's place in her affections; for the latter had been her great delight and interest in younger and happier days, and her solace in many a subsequent time of anxiety and trial. He was, too, so bound up with the memory of his mother, between whom and her sister-in-law there had existed a close friendship, that the sight of him brought back many most tender recollections, which, though sad to retrace in some respects, were yet so asso-

ciated in her mind with higher and more lasting hopes, that Aunt Lily was always glad to have such feelings awakened.

It was, besides, a great relief to her to perceive that her nephew, though necessarily much changed in external appearance by the lapse of time, had lost none of the simplicity and openness of his earlier years. He was now not quite six-and-twenty, tall and strong, with his father's fair complexion and large blue eyes; and though not inheriting the same regularity of feature which his sister Ada possessed, there was a geniality and vivacity in his expression, and a sweetness in his smile, which made his countenance a most attractive one to look upon.

"Well, Aunt Lily," he said, "here I am again! If it were not for Lionel sitting there, I could almost fancy I had never been away, this place looks so like old days—not changed in the least—nor you either, Auntie. You are just like one of your own evergreens."

Miss St Clair smiled. "Not quite that, my dear. I am afraid grey hair and failing strength tell tales; but I have not changed in liking to see you here, I am quite sure of that."

"I am very glad to hear it," he replied. "I

shall not leave you much alone. I mean to come up to be taught how to conduct myself, and to bring Julia too for a little tuition."

"Ah! the tuition days are over now, I think, Tom. I am fonder of spoiling than of instructing in my old age."

"Oh, well, that is just as good, and better. I shall come often to be spoiled, certainly, and cut Lionel out, if I can. He seems to look upon your house as half his home. What have you got there, Leo?" And Tom, as he spoke, stretched out his hand for the book, which still lay upon the table open at the pictures Lionel had been examining.

He started slightly as his eye fell upon the portrait, and gave a quick glance, as if of inquiry, towards his aunt.

Miss St Clair replied quietly—"It is your Uncle Lionel, Tom. His namesake takes great interest in his likeness. I think it is his favourite in the whole book."

Tom looked thoughtfully at the picture for a moment, and then saying, "I do not wonder; it is a noble face," he gave back the book to Lionel, and with a hasty inquiry as to what had become of Eustace, resumed his conversation with

his aunt, though in a less lively tone than before this interruption had occurred.

Lionel was somewhat puzzled by his brother's manner. He had never seen him look so before. But as Aunt Lily did not seem at all surprised, and spoke just as usual, he concluded that she understood what had passed; and the little maid Eliza coming in at this moment to announce that James Douglas was waiting to see Miss St Clair, the current of his thoughts was at once completely changed.

"May I go to Jem, Aunt Lily?" he said, eagerly. "I want to ask him about my boat."

"Yes, dear, do go to him. Take him into the parlour, and tell him I will see him in a few minutes."

"Don't stay very long, Lionel, please," said his brother. "It is late, and we must be going."

Half an hour, however, elapsed before Lionel returned, and, to judge by the sounds which penetrated from the parlour to the drawing-room, his interview with Jem had not been of the gravest description; but when at last he came bursting in, he perceived, from the earnest looks of his aunt and brother, that their conversation had been too interesting for them to have observed the

length of his absence, or even to be conscious how the twilight was rapidly merging into darkness.

Tom was speaking as Lionel entered, and the latter could not avoid hearing their last words—"Well, I suppose it must be so now. No doubt I was very wrong at the time, but I still think my first impression was the right one. Hollo! boy, you are there!" He broke off on perceiving Lionel, who was beginning an excuse for having stayed so long. "Oh, never mind; it is not your doing; it is all Aunt Lily's fault being so delightful, there is no getting away from her; but we must be off now, or my wife will scold. Good night, Auntie; we shall see you on Thursday, at any rate, to honour that young rascal, if I don't appear again before then."

"Yes," added Lionel, "papa is to send the carriage for you. And, Aunt Lily, don't forget to bring lots of flowers—dahlias, you know, and such things. Jem has promised to cut them; and some of the nice long willows and the bay leaves."

"Is there anything else you would like, cormorant?" said Aunt Lily, playfully, as she took leave of him. They were standing at the hall door, and Tom, being by this time half-way down

the garden, Lionel was obliged to follow without further delay. Seizing his straw hat, with a laughing adieu, he ran full speed after his brother ; while Miss St Clair, after exchanging a few words with James Douglas, who, during his brief visits at home, was in the habit of doing various little services for her in the garden and village, returned to her solitary room, there, by the side of a bright little fire which Eliza had considerably lighted, to muse in silence, which yet was by no means sad, over the incidents and conversations of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR'S BIRTHDAY.

"THREE cheers for Arthur Henry St Clair! Three times three, and one cheer more. Hurrah!"

And loud was the shout which arose from the lips of a merry young group, assembled under one of the large beech-trees on the lawn at Eagles-crag, early in the afternoon of the 21st of September. The day had been unusually warm for the season, and Colonel St Clair, being unwilling to disappoint his children of at least part of the festivities upon which they had set their hearts, had agreed to their inviting three or four of the very few young friends who lived within an easy distance, to spend the day with them, and after an early dinner, to adjourn to the open air for dessert. Even the children had scarcely ventured to reckon upon the last part of the programme being carried out, the weather in that equinoctial

month being generally so uncertain. But, so far, all had been beyond their expectations, and now even their father himself was sitting on a garden bench, between his sister and daughter-in-law, while the party of boys and girls followed their own devices among the trees round him ; and Ada and her elder brother strolled about, occasionally joining each group, and enjoying a quiet conversation together between times.

Mrs St Clair seemed to make herself very agreeable to her father-in-law as a companion. She had lively spirits, and a flow of pleasant easy talk ; and without actual beauty, her manners and appearance had a grace and softness which seldom failed to fascinate those over whom she had any influence.

At this moment she was looking particularly amused and smiling, for the boys were calling to her to look at and admire the elevated throne between the branches of the trees, which they had, with great pains, erected for their infant nephew's benefit.

The little hero of the day himself, however, when carefully placed by his father in his high position, did not altogether seem to appreciate the attentions paid him. He sat indeed con-

tentedly enough for a few minutes upon the raised blue velvet cushion, above which was suspended a large garland of most brilliant colours; and very pretty the little fellow looked in his white frock and blue ribbons—his eyes sparkling, and his cherub face beaming with smiles, as he crowed with delight over a beautiful coral and bells, his Aunt Ada's birthday gift, and now exhibited for his amusement by Emily. But at the loud sound of so many raised voices—being unconscious that his father's strong arm was all the while holding him fast, the smiles vanished, and the tiny arms were stretched out, with a decidedly piteous call of "Mama!"

"What! young one! frightened?—here, come to me, I'll land you safe," said Lionel, seizing him quickly, though with very gentle touch, and bearing him off across the grass, "Here is your son, Julia; he won't stand fire yet."

"Poor fellow!" said Julia, taking him in her arms, "he is hardly accustomed to so much noise, and you are rather rough with him, Lionel; he is fonder of Eustace."

"Scarcely, Julia, I think," said her husband, who had come up behind her; "it was all I could do to persuade him to come to me from Lionel

yesterday—and see! he wants to go back to him now.”

And true it was, that, with filial ingratitude, Baby Arthur began to struggle in his mother's arms, and to make most unmistakeable gestures towards Lionel, who, by no means daunted by his sister-in-law's insinuations, was performing sundry feats of agility in the background, with the view of regaining the child's attention.

Julia, however, kept to her point. “That is only because he is sleepy, and does not know what he would like,” she said, with a touch of sharpness in her tone. “I see much more of his ways than you do, Tom, and I have observed particularly that he prefers Eustace.”

“Just as you like, my dear,” replied Tom, with a good-humoured smile, “have it all your own way; but for the present, allow me to suggest that the air is getting too cool for the juvenile to stay out; so I shall take the liberty of conveying him to the nursery. Here, look out, Bambino! come to papa.”

And Arthur, responding with great alacrity to this appeal, was speedily carried into the house, and confided to the care of old nurse, who, having been in the family for above thirty years, regarded

him with intense pride, as the first of a new generation.

In the meanwhile, Lionel and the rest of the young party made the most of their holiday afternoon by an animated succession of sports and games; and the elders of the party being busily engaged in conversation, Tom's absence was not much observed, till about an hour later, when, just as his father had expressed some wonder as to where he was, he appeared again upon the lawn, looking disturbed and anxious.

"Aunt Lily," he said, "do you think it is possible that I dropped my pocket-book at your house the other evening? I never missed it till just now, but I cannot find it anywhere, and I recollect having it with me that day."

"I have not seen it," replied Miss St Clair, "but I cannot be sure. Eliza and I have been unusually busy these last two days, and I have sat very little in that room; so it is not unlikely that if the book were there, it might be overlooked. But I will make a search for it as soon as I go home; or I could send a message this evening by Jem, if you like; he is here still, waiting for orders."

"Thank you, Auntie; but to-morrow will be

quite time enough. It has a spring fastening, and will not open for everybody."

"You are sure of that, Tom?" said Colonel St Clair. "It might be troublesome if any of your papers were missing when you get it back."

"I am quite sure; there is no fear," replied Tom. "My only doubt is as to where I have dropped it. If it is in the Woodbank drawing-room, all is right."

"Well, we will hope so; but it is time we should all adjourn to the house now," rejoined the Colonel. "You know we have promised to let the poor boys know their fate to-night; and when their companions have gone, they will be impatient. And that reminds me, Tom,"—he went on, taking his son's arm as they were entering the house,—“I rather shrink from the task; I am inclined to leave it to you. Will you not tell them for me?"

"Oh no, my dear father! pray do not ask me," returned Tom, earnestly; "the decision must come from yourself, or it will have no weight. I don't mean, you know," he added, seeing his father's disappointed look, "that I would not do it at once, if it were anything else. I will be present willingly while you tell them; but indeed I think you must be the person to speak."

Colonel St Clair stood, as if irresolute, for a few moments, at the top of the steps, before entering the house ; at length he said, "They are both so impetuous, I fear making discord between them ; but I have no doubt you are right ; it is a hard task, but I will do it," and then he followed Ada into the drawing-room, where the boys and Emily were taking leave of Charles Seyton, a fine boy of thirteen, and three or four other young friends, who had to set off early, in order to reach their various homes in tolerable light.

A great deal of laughing and joking ensued before the final adieus were said ; and Miss St Clair, feeling slightly fatigued, after looking on smilingly for a little while, retired to her own room to rest. Living so much alone, as she was now accustomed to do, even the sound of so much talking round her, and the flow of merriment, greatly as she enjoyed it, tried her strength and nerves ; and besides, this having been the first real family-gathering at which she had been present for many years, she was glad to have an interval of leisure to reflect upon the meetings of the day, and to consider her own impressions of the different members of the family, each

in his or her own ways, so deeply interesting to her.

Beguiling the time with such thoughts as these, Miss St Clair was hardly conscious how late it was, till a musical-clock in the passage, just outside her bedroom door, struck the chime of seven, and reminded her that she would now be expected to rejoin the family circle.

Her simple toilette being soon accomplished, she opened the door to go down-stairs, but was startled to see Lionel on the landing-place, leaning over the banisters, and covering his face with his hands.

"Why, Lionel, my dear boy," she said, going up to him, "what is the matter? has anything gone wrong?"

Lionel did not immediately move, and his aunt repeated her question; then he lifted up his head, and as he turned his face towards her, she was struck with his change of expression since she had seen him an hour or two before—all the smiling brightness gone, and instead, traces of anger, mortified pride, and wounded feeling, in his flashing eyes and firmly closed mouth.

"Wrong!" he said, more indignantly than

Miss St Clair had ever heard him speak before. "Yes, it is all wrong! I never knew anything like it; when Eustace and I have never been separated before, there papa says now that I must go to school in England, and Eustace, with the rest, to Edinburgh—just the very thing I shall hate! I know I shall! And he will not even tell me the reason; and Tom would not say a word for me, though he knew I did not want to go; but I won't put up with it. I won't!"

"Hush, hush, my dear child," said Miss St Clair, laying her hand gently upon his shoulder, and almost unconsciously to himself, drawing him into her room, where she sat down, and he stood by her side; "don't be in such despair about it. It has taken you by surprise, I daresay, coming so suddenly; but when you get accustomed to the idea, you will not dislike it so much."

"I shall!—I know I shall! Nothing ever happened like this before; and papa did not even look the same. It is Julia! I am sure it is Julia's doing. If papa had told me *why* he wished it, I would not have minded so much; but he refused to give me any explanation."

"But, dear Lionel, you should trust him; he

is not obliged to give you his reasons for what he does."

"Perhaps not; but he always has done so before," replied Lionel, rather more quietly.

"Well, then, you are all the more bound to put confidence in him now. I am sure you have never found his kindness fail, and there is no fear of your making that discovery, whatever happens. I did not think my lion-hearted boy would have allowed himself to be so easily conquered: that is not being greater 'than he that taketh a city.' Is it, Leo?"

With some boys, an allusion of this kind would have been irritating, rather than the contrary, but it was not so with Lionel; he remained silent at first, but his countenance softened, and the large tears which had been gathering in his eyes, began to roll down his cheeks; he struggled against such expression of feeling for a moment, and then, giving way entirely, he threw himself down upon the ground beside his aunt. "O Auntie!" he said, as soon as he could command his voice to speak. "O Aunt Lily, I quite forgot!—but I cannot help it—indeed I cannot—I do hate the thought of going!"

"Well, well, dear, calm yourself; we will say

no more about it just now ; we will wait till you are able to speak quietly. By and by we shall all see that things are just as they should be."

And so, under gentle words of soothing, Lionel gradually regained his equanimity, and Miss St Clair prevailed upon him to go down to the drawing-room with her.

As they crossed the hall, Eustace rushed into the house by the back entrance. "Hollo, Leo !" he said, with an air of bravado, "where have you been all this time ? Telling your grievances to Aunt Lily ?"

The tone of sarcasm in which his brother put this question was too much for Lionel in his present humour, and turning round, he replied hotly, "Well, and what if I have ? It is better than telling them to Ned Harding, at any rate, which is what you have been doing !"

What retort might have ensued remained matter of uncertainty, for at this moment Ada opened the drawing-room door, and Colonel St Clair himself called to the boys to come in.

"Come, and let us have some music !" he said ; "you are teasing your aunt, boys, I am sure, with so much noise ; go and try to produce something a little more melodious."

Ada, however, who was quick in discerning the varying moods of those around her, perceived at once from her brothers' faces that something was wrong ; and guessing also pretty correctly what might be the cause, she considerably gave them leisure to recover themselves, by inviting her sister-in-law to join her in a pianoforte duet.

By the time this was concluded, Lionel and Eustace had become so deeply interested in a series of adventures which their brother was recounting for his aunt's entertainment, as apparently to have forgotten their disagreement ; and Lionel at least looked nearly as bright as usual, when at length they joined their voices with Ada's in several simple glees and trios.

Thus the evening seemed likely to end pleasantly, after all ; music and merry talk filled up the time till the usual hour of retiring to rest had nearly arrived, and the elders of the party began to hope that the boys' ruffled feelings had already subsided, and that they would now be willing to acquiesce cheerfully in the arrangements in view for them.

This hope, however, was doomed to speedy disappointment.

The plentiful repast which, in consideration of

the early dinner, concluded the day, was greatly enjoyed by all, especially by little Emily, who, in order to partake of it, had been allowed to sit up long past her usual bed-time. But this over, even she was obliged to confess to being tired and sleepy, and accordingly both she and her brothers were dismissed for the night, with many charges from Ada to go to bed at once, and on no account to play or make a noise in each other's rooms. And Mrs St Clair, having nursery arrangements to attend to, went up-stairs at the same time, so that there was reason to hope the injunction might be attended to.

The party in the drawing-room were therefore considerably startled, half an hour later, by the sound of voices talking eagerly overhead, and also by a loud noise, as if articles of furniture were being pushed about.

"It is in Lionel's room," said Ada, "Eustace must be there; shall I go and tell them to be quiet, papa?"

"Not just yet, dear," replied her father, "wait a minute, and see if they will stop of their own accord."

The disturbance, however, instead of abating, increased, and soon the sound of a door violently

opened, and then as violently shut, accompanied by still louder talking, made both Ada and her brother start up.

"Perhaps I had better go myself," said Colonel St Clair, following them into the hall; "I am afraid there must be some quarrel."

"No, no, sir; you keep still," returned his son, smiling and leading him back into the drawing-room; "Ada and I will settle them. Please stay with him," he added in a low voice to his aunt.

And shutting the door quickly after him, he and Ada ran up-stairs, and through a winding passage which led to Lionel's room.

There, rather to their dismay, they found the two boys engaged in a regular hand-to-hand encounter. Eustace was endeavouring to push his way into the room, while Lionel with all his might struggled to prevent his entrance, and to close the door against him, which had again burst open. Both boys were in the greatest state of excitement, their faces crimson with indignation, and so much out of breath that, even after their brother had stepped in between, and forcibly separated them, it was some minutes before either of them could speak so as to be intelligible."

"What is it all about?" said Ada, when, Tom's

presence having produced some little effect, she at last contrived to possess herself of Eustace's hands, while her brother kept hold of Lionel. "I thought you were both safe in bed; papa and Aunt Lily are quite frightened."

Lionel, in the midst of his wrath, looked a little concerned. "Well, I'm very sorry, Tom," he said, "but it was not my fault at first; I did not want to frighten anybody, and I was going to bed. But I won't have Eustace coming into my room just as he pleases, and saying what he did,—I won't!"

"I said nothing but what was quite true," returned Eustace, sullenly. He never gave vent to his passion in words, as Lionel did, and therefore the latter often got a greater share of blame in their disputes than he really deserved; for the feelings of anger with Eustace took much deeper hold of his mind, and left much more lasting effects behind them.

Tom, however, soon put a stop to the altercation.

"Whether it was true or not, Eustace, you had no business to come to Lionel to say it; you were both expressly told to stay in your own rooms when you came up-stairs, so go back to



"Standing with him in the moonlight."

yours now, and don't be seen out of it again to-night."

Eustace, somewhat overawed by his brother's quiet decision of manner, unwillingly allowed himself to be led away by Ada, who, after seeing him safely ensconced in his own little dormitory, went down-stairs to reassure her father by making very light of the whole affair, and to sing one more song for his and her aunt's amusement.

Tom, in the meanwhile, had entered Lionel's room, and, the candle having been extinguished in the scuffle, was standing with him in the moonlight, which was streaming in in a flood of pale brilliancy through the casement window.

"Lionel," he said, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, and speaking with a tenderness of tone such as Lionel had never yet heard from him, "Lionel, my dear fellow, all this is very hard for you to bear patiently. I know it is; but if you will only try to submit just now, you will be able to understand it in time."

"But why should I not know what it means?" said Lionel, trying to speak quietly. "Is it your doing, Tom? Papa always used to let me say what I thought."

"No, no, Leo, it is none of my doing; don't

think that. I have no more to do with it than you have yourself, and I am on your side of the question in the main ; but still, I think my father is right under the circumstances. Will not you try to believe so too ?”

“ I *would* try, Tom—I *was* trying ; but then Eustace came and taunted me, and said I wanted to set myself up over him and you too. He is often angry, but he never said anything like that before, and I am sure I never thought of being above him at all.”

“ No, I daresay not, poor fellow,” said Tom, half smiling ; and then pondering for a few minutes, with a sort of absence in his manner, “ I don’t know,” he resumed, “ what Eustace might mean. Most likely he was in a rage, and scarcely knew himself. We will let that pass. You will both have forgotten all about it by to-morrow morning. But, Lionel, listen to me for one moment. You asked me, the other day, to get up a class for the fisher lads ; why did you wish to have it ?”

Lionel was surprised at this sudden change of subject, as it appeared to him, but he answered promptly—“ O Tom ! it was only to try to do them some good. They are very ignorant, and I

thought, perhaps, if they knew more of the Bible, they might learn to be better than many of them are. I think it was talking to Aunt Lily one day about the parable of the sower that put it first into my head. She said every one should help to sow the good seed."

"Yes," replied Tom, thoughtfully; "but then, Lionel, there is the fruit. What kind of crop should you expect to spring up?"

After a minute's reflection, Lionel said, in a low voice, "I suppose it ought to be keeping God's commandments?"

"This commandment, Leo—'Take my yoke upon you.'"

Lionel was silent.

"There is no safety elsewhere for any of us," continued Tom. "When I was only a little older than you now are, Lionel, I threw away the hopes and the happiness of years, both for myself and for others, because I would not 'take up' the cross God had sent me. If I could, brother, I would save you from doing the same. I would win you to consent to submit cheerfully to our father's arrangements; and you may trust me that one day you will thank him for his care over you at this crisis."

Lionel was completely subdued. All his best feelings were roused by his brother's affection, and by this appeal to those higher motives which were beginning, though as yet but feebly, to exercise an influence over his character. And there was besides a stamp of sincerity upon every word Tom spoke, which had great weight with him.

Still with the impression fresh in his mind of the cause of provocation, he could not muster courage to make any answer beyond a murmured promise to try, and Tom did not expect more. A short silence ensued, during which Lionel stood leaning his head against his brother's shoulder ; and then the latter went on in a lighter tone—"It is often a harder fight, Leo, to some people's natures to yield one's own will, than to march up to a cannon's mouth, or to climb the topmast in a storm. I know, many's the time when I would rather have done the one than the other ; but once achieved, it is half the battle of life. So don't you be cast down ; you will see things more brightly soon, and, some day, I will tell you a story about myself, which will show you more clearly what I mean."

The promise of a story brightened up Lionel at once. "O Tom ! I shall like that," he said ;

"there are a great many things I want to know, only I have never had any one to ask about them who would tell me."

"Well, by and by, you shall ask me whatever you choose. I want you to trust me in everything, old fellow. But we must not talk any more just now; it's getting late, and you are tired out. So good night; I hope your friend the moon will speed you on your way, as you have left yourself at her mercy."

When, an hour later, Colonel St Clair very gently opened the door of the same room, and looked in, he found Lionel lying in a profound slumber, his head resting on his arm, his countenance placid and unruffled, and a smile on his lips, which showed that, for the moment at least, even the shadow of his boyish griefs had passed away.

CHAPTER V.

THE POCKET-BOOK.

“Now don’t, dear mother, don’t take on so ; you know Ned’s often been away before, and he aye came back safe,—don’t, mother.”

And with gentle caressing touch, little Kate Harding put her arms round her mother, a middle-aged woman, in a widow’s dress, who was sitting by their cottage fire, covering her face with her hands.

The little comforter’s appeal was, however, not in vain ; the widow looked up, and brushing away her tears, tried to smile as she met the look of anxious concern which was shading her child’s usually happy face.

“Yes, dear,” she said, “I know it ; but he never went like this before. I’ll have no way to hear about him this time, and there’ll be no one to keep him to writing.”

“Oh, but, mother, I never had time to tell you, you were so busy with Ned’s things; but I asked at the master, when I was at the school yesterday, and he said the captain of Ned’s new ship was a friend of his, and he was a nice man; so I daresay he’ll make Ned write, just as Jem used to do. The master said that ship never stopped very long away—isn’t that a good thing, mother? Ned’ll be back before the roses come again, maybe; wouldn’t it be fine, mother, if he was?”

“Well, dearie, we must hope the best; it’s a long weary voyage they’ve gone, but they may do it quicker than we think; and now I’ll have to get ready, and go away to the Tower with that pocket-book. I’m wholly at a loss to know whatever the laddie was thinking of, not to take it back himself as soon as he found it. I’m real ashamed to tell the Colonel we kept it in the house all night.”

“O mother! you know Ned hadn’t much time, and he was talking to you. I daresay you won’t see the Colonel, and I’m sure Mr Tom won’t mind; he’s a very good-natured gentleman.”

Mrs Harding smiled again more cheerfully.

Well, Katie," she said, "I see Ned 'll never want a friend while he has his sister to stand up for him. I hope he 'll do as much for you one of these days."

Kate opened her large brown eyes with a look of surprise.

"For me, mother? Why, mother, I have got you; I don't need anybody else."

In a very short time the mother and daughter were equipped to set out on their walk. It was a cold frosty evening, and they seemed but poorly clad to face the autumn wind which was blowing across the moor, at one end of which, on the edge of a wood, their little cottage stood.

Mrs Harding, notwithstanding her humble dwelling and homely dress, both in her mode of speech and in general appearance, was superior to the ordinary class of peasantry. Indeed, though from long and intimate association, she had in many respects fallen into the idiom and phraseology of those around her, she had originally sprung of very respectable parents in one of the southern counties of England, and had first come to Scotland thirty years before this time, as a young girl, to wait upon the lady of Eaglescrag.

Subsequently she had married the forester upon the estate, and ever since then, both during her

husband's lifetime and after his death, a close connection had been kept up between her and the family of St Clair.

Of six children, two only were left to the widow; and amidst all her difficulties, with straightened means, and a wilful wayward son, it was to one or other friendly ear at the Tower that she poured out the tale of her distresses from time to time.

Not, indeed, that she was much given to complaining; her disposition was naturally cheerful and contented, and by the help of Divine grace, she had well learned the lesson of resignation which so many sorrows had combined to teach her; but it lightened her burdens, and cheered her spirit, to speak freely to those who, if they did not always fully understand her troubles, were yet ever ready to sympathise with her in them; and she, on the other hand, would occasionally let fall many a wise hint which helped to steady and to guide the thoughtlessness and inexperience of the young St Clairs.

Even Mrs St Clair's death, though a great loss to Mrs Harding in itself and in many of its consequences, helped to draw the bond of affection between her and the motherless family yet closer

than it had been before. Having known Mrs St Clair from the earliest days of the latter's married life, when as a bride she had come for her first visit to her husband's father, the former proprietor, Mrs Harding was well acquainted with many domestic particulars which were unknown to the world in general; and the return of young Mr St Clair at this time, had been scarcely less interesting to her than it was to his own family circle. To her, as well as to Mrs Douglas, "Mr Tom" was an object of untold admiration and affection. Already he had several times found his way across the moor to the widow's cottage, on which occasions Kate had invariably been made happy by a liberal gift of small silver coins, one of which she never failed to deposit in her missionary-box, while with the remainder she hastened to a little shop in the hamlet, a quarter of a mile off, there to exchange them for some special dainty for her mother's tea. Thus, though such an idea had never occurred to the simple-hearted child, the widow and her visitor had quiet leisure to engage in many long and earnest conversations, which, however, always seemed to have just terminated when Katie reappeared, dropping her curtsy in the doorway.

After crossing the moor on this cold evening, Kate and her mother turned into a narrow lane shaded by trees, the rapidly falling leaves of which strewed the ground like a carpet, and afforded great amusement to the little girl as she danced along, crackling them under her feet. Soon, however, they had to leave the lane, and turn into a plantation, through which there was a path leading to the high road. They crossed the road, when they reached it, and then climbed a stile into another plantation, from whence they emerged upon a small meadow close to the back premises of Eaglescrag Tower. The moon had been shining brightly all the time, and Kate had chattered the whole way, the exhilaration of the air, and the novelty of walking in the moonlight, having apparently in some degree tended to make her forget the parting with her brother. So that by the time they reached the kitchen door, even the widow had regained a measure of her ordinary cheerfulness.

A loud sound of young voices talking and laughing, struck upon their ears from within, as they stood upon the step ; and almost before there had been time to reply to Mrs Harding's gentle knock, the door burst open, and some one wrapped

in a rough coat came so hastily out, that he did not perceive that any one was there till he nearly pushed against the widow, who, being easily startled, with difficulty repressed an exclamation of fear.

"O mother!" said Kate, laughing, "it is only Jem Douglas; he wont hurt us."

"No indeed, Katie," replied Jem. "I came out so sudden, like, I never saw you; and now I must hurry away, but I'll be over to see you before I sail yet." And with a friendly nod and smile, Jem disappeared into the darkness, and Mrs Harding turned to the door, where the two boys Lionel and Eustace were standing, full of amusement at the encounter.

"Come in, Nelly, come in," said the former. "I did not know you were standing there, or I would not have pushed Jem out so hard; it is well he did not knock you down. Papa and the rest have gone out to dinner to-day, and we are having a famous baking while they are away. Look there! I am to have some of those to take to school with me!"

And ushering Mrs Harding into the old-fashioned kitchen, Lionel pointed in triumph to a pile of biscuits of various shapes, and a long

row of currant cakes and buns, which seemed to have very lately emerged from the oven, the door of which Sarah the cook was just opening to extract another batch—a process which little Emily with smiling eyes, and her rosy cheeks brilliant from the heat of the fire, was watching with the deepest interest.

At the sight of Mrs Harding and Kate, however, the cakes were forgotten, and she sprang forward radiant with delight. Katie, with ever ready politeness, curtsied to her as if she had been a grown-up lady; but no thoughts of ceremony disturbed Emily's welcome to her little friend. Seizing her hand, with an exclamation at finding it so cold, she led her to the side of the wide hearth, and made her sit down beside her on a little stone settle, while Lionel placed a chair for the widow in front of the fire.

"Thank you kindly, Master Lionel," the latter said, as she took his offered seat, "this is cheery, and you are every one looking beautiful. But I'm sorry the Colonel's out; did you say Mr Tom was out too, sir?"

"Yes. Tom and Julia, and Ada too, the whole set of them. But they went quite early, so it won't be long now before they come home. Don't

you be in a hurry, Nelly, now ; don't you know Kate's going to have her supper before you take her back?"

"No, no ; you must not let her be troublesome, Master Lionel ; she will be quite uplifted talking to Miss Emily there, she does not need anything more. Oh now, Master Eustace, you are too kind !" Mrs Harding added, as Eustace appeared with a little tray, on which stood cake and wine, which he had gone to the dining-room to procure.

It was curious to mark the contrast between these two boys in their intercourse with those whose outward position was inferior to their own. Both were equally courteous and pleasant in manner ; but while Eustace, even in his kindest attentions, seemed always to keep the difference of station in mind, there was an easy grace and a sweetness of demeanour in Lionel, which gave the impression of its never occurring to him to consider whether there was any difference or not. He possessed a rare faculty of readily discerning the points he had in common with those with whom he was brought in contact, and of leaving out of sight what was uncongenial and unsuitable. And so far from this quality tending to undue familiarity between him and his rustic

friends, the result was quite the reverse. Seldom, if ever, was a word spoken to Lionel, even by the rough boys who occasionally shared his sports by land or water, that he would in the least have minded his father or brother overhearing.

Thus, though both boys were great favourites among all classes, the chain of feeling, as regarded Lionel, was the more deeply linked in the hearts of the circle of dependents. And none knew or understood this better than Mrs Harding.

"And are you really going to school so soon, Master Lionel?" she said, after a few minutes had passed.

"Oh yes, Nelly; did not you know?" replied Lionel, evidently trying hard to look unconcerned. "Tom and Julia are going to stay here till Christmas, at any rate, and papa and the rest of us start for Edinburgh on Monday. And I believe I am to be packed off, a few days later, to that horrid south, somewhere up in the Isle of Wight. I'm glad it's an island though; there'll be some water to look at!"

"Yes, my dear, and a deal more besides," said Mrs Harding. "It's a lovely place. My old home is there, and I know the whole country well."

"Do you really? I'm very glad," returned Lionel, quite cheered. "And are any of your own people there now?"

"Yes, one or two, besides little ones. I have a brother who lives at Brading still, with his wife and children; and my sister is somewhere near there too."

"Oh, that's jolly! I'll look them up for certain, and tell them all about you—see if I don't. I say, Nelly, you had better come up with me, and see them for yourself."

"Don't talk humbug, Leo," said Eustace, in a tone which he meant to be contemptuous, but which was only impatient. "Nelly go with you! Such an idea!"

The rest of the party, however, only laughed all the more merrily at Eustace's indignation; and Emily, in particular, seemed highly amused.

"O Lionel!" she said, "you would look so funny going to school with Nelly beside you! How the boys would laugh when they saw you!"

"Trust them for that, Emmy, whatever I do," said Lionel, twining his fingers playfully in Emily's glossy curls. "I shouldn't object to Nelly's company a bit, only she won't go. But, hollo! there comes papa now!" he exclaimed,

as a loud peal of the gate-bell announced the return of the master of the house.

Off rushed the boys to open the front door, and to superintend the progress of the horses to the stable, a process which, though almost of daily occurrence, never seemed to lose its charm for them. Mrs Harding sat still, enjoying the warm fire, and waiting for a summons. And in a minute or two, Ada having heard from her brothers that the widow was there, came tripping down the steps into the kitchen, looking very sweet and fresh in her transparent pink evening dress, with a wreath of roses in her hair, and her scarf hanging loosely round her.

"Oh, you dear old Nelly!" she said, as she entered. "How delightful of you to be here! I should have been so sorry if I had missed you. I hope Emily and Sarah have taken good care of you."

"Oh yes, indeed, my dear," replied Mrs Harding; "they have all been as kind as could be. And they are looking so well. And you too, Miss Ada," she added, as she gazed with fond admiration upon the blooming face of the child who had been her latest and most fondly cherished charge.

"Yes," said Ada, "we are all very flourishing just now ; but we shall soon be scattered. What do you say, Nelly, to one of the young birds taking flight out of the nest?"

"Oh, poor Master Lionel! I'm real sorry to think of him going so far away ; but I suppose it must be for his good, or the Colonel would not send him."

"Well, so they say. If you could persuade him to be of that opinion, it would be well, Nelly," returned Ada, smiling. "He takes it desperately to heart, poor boy, and makes me the confidante of his woes."

"That will do you both good, my dear," said the widow. "By and by you will see that it has all been arranged for the best, Miss Ada."

"Oh, naughty Nelly ! you are just as hard-hearted as papa and Tom. I suppose there is no help for it. But don't you want to see papa ? I am sure he will be delighted to have a visit from you ; just come up with me to the library, and I will tell him. Shall Katie come too ?"

But Mrs Harding said gently that she would rather leave Kate behind ; and Emily, being desirous of displaying some of her private treasures, begged to be allowed to take the little girl to the

day nursery, where they could amuse themselves quietly till sent for.

Very cordial and kind was the reception given to the widow, both by Colonel St Clair and his son ; and great also the satisfaction of the latter at the sight of his missing pocket-book. Mrs Harding made many apologies for her son's delay in returning it to its owner, after he had given notice of its loss. " But you see, sir," she added, " Ned never said a word to me about it till this morning, and I was so put out, like, about him going away, that I never minded to ask him how it happened, or where he found the book."

" Oh, well, don't be disturbed about it now," said Mr St Clair. " I am very glad to have it back ; that is all that signifies."

" But I am very sorry Ned has gone to sea again, Mrs Harding," said the Colonel. " I had hoped he was going to take good advice this time."

" Well, sir, I hoped the same," replied Mrs Harding, the tears starting to her eyes. " I told him of your honour's offer, and how good it was of you to trouble about him ; but it was all of no use—he would not heed. We must just have patience still. Young hearts are often hard to win, as we know ourselves, sir."

And then ensued a few minutes of quiet conversation, as between friends, which, if it could not do much towards healing the wound in the mother's heart, at least consoled and encouraged her, by a sense of willing and active sympathy from those upon whose judgment she placed so much reliance.

But a short time, however, had elapsed before the interview was interrupted by Ada, who came in to say that supper was ready in the kitchen ; and Mrs Harding, having received an invitation from Mr St Clair to return soon to see his wife and little boy, withdrew.

Ada accompanied her down-stairs, but they had barely reached the entrance-hall before the door of the study re-opened quickly, and Tom's voice was heard calling to his sister.

"Ada," he said, "please ask Mrs Harding to come back for a moment ; you need not come yourself, dear, I will bring her down again directly."

Somewhat startled, Mrs Harding retraced her steps, leaving Ada leaning on the carved pedestal which adorned the entrance-hall. Ada had not much curiosity as to the cause of this recall, as she knew there were often business matters to settle

between her father and the widow, but while she stood there, waiting for the latter's return, she could not avoid overhearing her brother say, before he closed the door of the study, "I am rather afraid this book has been opened, Mrs Harding ; the spring is broken."

"Oh, sir !" was Mrs Harding's reply, in a tone of alarm, "I hope nothing is missing out of it."

"Nothing, nothing ; all is right inside, only" — and then the door was shut, and Ada heard no more.

The colloquy had struck her, not so much as to the words themselves, as from the serious manner of her brother ; but upon a moment's thought she attributed this to his anxiety on Edward Harding's account ; and not feeling very much concern in the matter, she was turning to go into the drawing-room, when, on looking round, she found Eustace standing close behind her, his face quite pale and his dark eyes dilated and bright with excitement.

"Why, Eustace, my darling Eustace, what is the matter ? What makes you look so pale ? Tell me, is anything wrong, dear ?"

The sound of his sister's voice seemed to bring the colour back to Eustace's cheeks, and he tried


to laugh it off, and say there was nothing the matter—he was only cold, he would be all right when he got to the fire; but still he did not move, and when Ada continued to look anxiously at him, he turned his head away, and said, “Did you hear what Tom said to Nelly just now?”

“Yes,” replied Ada, “I heard; but what do you mean? It was nothing particular, only about Tom’s pocket-book.”

“Yes, I know; but I thought perhaps —. Do you think, Ada, Ned can have taken anything out of it?”

“No; of course, I don’t think so. You heard Tom say it was all right, and you ought not to hint at such a thing. Now, Eustace, mind me. Don’t you go and mystify yourself prying into other people’s affairs. You know you have got into scrapes in that way before, so take care now.”

Eustace looked sulky. He twitched his shoulder from under Ada’s hand, which she had laid caressingly upon it, and would not immediately speak. Then suddenly he resumed his ordinary manner, and, looking full in her face, said, “I have no need to take care, you are so sharp, Ada. I only wondered what Ned had been after, he went away



so hurriedly. But, as you say, of course it is no concern of mine;" and with these words, holding his head very erect, he walked off into the drawing-room, where Lionel, making an impetuous raid upon him from the recesses of the window-curtains, within which he had been for some time concealed with that object in view, effectually drove all thoughts of mystery out of Eustace's head, for the moment at least.

Ada, however, could not forget what had passed. Had she witnessed the same thing in Lionel, she would not have felt the least uneasiness; for he often gave way to sudden impulses of feeling, the causes of which seldom failed to transpire, if of any consequence, and if not, the ebullition was generally evanescent, and left no apparent trace behind.

But with Eustace the case was different. His feelings were not so finely strung, nor his temper so open, and Ada knew that there must have been some special cause, and she feared, a wrong one, to move him in this unusual way.

Being her youngest brother, and not possessing in an equal degree the peculiar charm of looks and disposition which made Lionel such a universal favourite, Eustace had, ever since his mother's

death, been the chosen property of his elder sister ; and though her fondness for Lionel was certainly not less, yet, knowing how the latter's lovable nature wound round her father, and indeed round their whole circle, she had more of a feeling of protection towards Eustace, and always felt more anxious on his behalf.

On this occasion, however, she knew that nothing was to be gained from him by direct inquiry—that would have sealed his lips at once—and she did not wish to attract attention to the incident ; so she resolved to say nothing to any one, and by the help of a lively game, in which all could join, had the satisfaction of seeing Eustace, to all appearance, in his usual spirits before the close of the evening.

In the meanwhile, Mrs Harding and Kate had pursued their way safely across the dark moor to their rural dwelling. The moon was not visible now, and they would have had some difficulty in following the path, had not Colonel St Clair given orders to provide them with a lantern, by the help of which they were enabled to avoid the various peat-holes and ditches in which the moor abounded.

Katie's visit had quite raised her spirits, and for about half the way home she entertained her


mother with glowing descriptions of little Emily's dolls and other toys, and more especially of her books and pictures, which seemed to excite the deepest interest in Katie's mind ; but as they drew nearer home she began to feel sleepy, and at last ran along at her mother's side in silence, leaving Mrs Harding at liberty to follow her own thoughts, among which, perhaps, one of the most cheering was the recollection of her late interview, and the knowledge that she had been able to deliver the lost pocket-book into Mr St Clair's own hands.

CHAPTER VI.

LIFE IN THE SOUTH.

Soon after noon, on an October day, the steamer plying between Portsmouth and Ryde started on its course from the former port. Notwithstanding the lateness of the season, being Saturday, the deck was thronged with a motley crowd of passengers, to whom the bright sunshine, and calm, though cold blue waters, seemed to promise a pleasant and swift transit to the shores of the Fair Isle.

Numerous and varied were the groups scattered over saloon, deck, and steerage. Families of parents and children returning from prolonged summer wanderings—invalids proceeding from more ungenial climes to take refuge in a southern and clearer atmosphere—stray little ones, seeking to peer into every forbidden corner they could discover, and rescued from thence by anxious



guardians—men of business, with jaded looks, after a week's hard toil in office or warehouse—and lads and young men from similar localities, clustering together with many a joke and merry laugh, and rejoicing in their escape for two days from the smoke and bustle of city work—while, dispersed up and down among the multitude, were a few solitary individuals who seemed to have no connexion with any of their fellow-travellers, and whose apparently greatest enjoyment was inhaling the fresh sea-breeze, and in surveying the picturesque prospect opening before them, as the steamer ploughed her way across the narrow channel.

Among these last was Lionel St Clair, who, leaning upon the iron railing on the top of the saddle-box, had his eyes fixed with evident and unprised admiration on the rich loveliness of the shore whither he was bound. The bracing air had brightened his colour, and made his eyes sparkle; and the half smile which, as he looked on the sea, gradually pervaded his unusually ruddy face, seemed to indicate the springing up of latent hope within him, that possibly, even in this strange land, there might be new sources of rest in store for him.

Lionel's mind had passed through many phases of thought and feeling since that evening at Eaglescrag when first he heard of his banishment, as he considered it, from home.

Short as the time was, he seemed, even to his own consciousness, to have made a decided step out of childhood, and to have really grown older in the struggle occasioned by the antagonism between his own wishes and the plans made for him.

The first vehemence of excitement having subsided, in which he had given vent to his feelings of disappointment and anger, he had ceased to recur to it seriously in words, and had acquiesced without any but playful murmurings in the arrangements and preparations for his approaching journey. And so light-hearted was his demeanour, and so joyous his outward merriment, that even Tom had begun to hope that the strong dislike he had at first expressed had been more imaginary than real.

Those who knew him best, however, and had been accustomed to watch him more closely, could perceive that beneath his mirthful gaiety there flowed a deeper current of feeling, and that the parting with the scenes and associations of

his childhood was costing him more than any one knew.

Except, perhaps, his aunt, no one, indeed, not even Colonel St Clair himself, really estimated the strength of the boy's deep attachment to his accustomed haunts. Not that his residence among them had been uniformly unbroken hitherto, but he had never, within his recollection, been too far off to prevent frequent intercourse, and Woodbank had often been his home even when the rest of the family were absent.

And thus, in these last days at Eaglescrag, when in company with Eustace, and sometimes with their elder brother also, long hours were spent in rambles over the hills, and through the glens, his companions little thought how Lionel was treasuring up each well-known spot in the recesses of his memory—sketching them with his pencil, where that was possible, and clinging to each turn and woodland vista with an intensity of affection of which those only are capable who possess that ardent love of nature which makes every point of beauty in scenery seem itself like a friend.

To all outward appearance, notwithstanding, matters were proceeding cheerfully and smoothly ;

and though Lionel had by no means, in reality, become reconciled to the change, still the effort of submission had done much towards quieting his mind. Perhaps, also, the charm of novelty was beginning to have some influence with him, especially as he could scarcely have analysed his own feelings himself, nor have explained exactly what it was in the whole arrangements that so jarred upon them.

To Eustace, possibly, he might have been led to disclose some of his private musings, but, unfortunately, the latter chose to dwell upon his own share of the grievance; and ever since the occasion of their first quarrel on the subject, Lionel had had an instinctive feeling that some idea had then taken possession of Eustace's mind which was tending to undermine the brotherly confidence which had ever till now subsisted between them.

Their tastes and dispositions were in many ways very dissimilar; but the two boys had grown up side by side from infancy, and having, till this break occurred, indulged in a constant interchange of thought and interest, it was an aggravation of the proposed separation to have any cloud between them now; more especially as

Eustace gave no clue to the cause of his altered manner, and Lionel was too proud to ask questions to which he felt assured he should receive no answer.

Reminiscences of the past thus mingled with Lionel's visions of the present, while he stood on the deck of the steamer, at one moment pondering over all that had come and gone of late between himself and his home circle ; and the next, trying to compare the well-remembered scenery of his beloved Highlands, with the more brightly variegated landscape, and more luxuriant verdure of the attractive-looking island he was approaching ; and so absorbed was he in this multiplicity of ideas, that it was not till the vessel was letting of her steam in entering the harbour at Ryde, that he became aware of the near vicinity to himself of a boy about his own age, though somewhat shorter and broader, with a round rosy face, and lively blue eyes, who was standing just below the paddle-box, gazing intently at him.

As Lionel looked down, and their eyes met, the boy made a sudden spring towards him, and said abruptly, " I say, are you the new fellow going up to Clifford's ? "

So frank was the tone, and so friendly the face,

forgot. Nor did his pleasure lessen as the journey proceeded, and as the coach brought him nearer to the small town, in which Seaview Lodge, the residence of Mr Clifford, and Lionel's own present destination, was situated.

After passing over several ups and downs of undulating country, and more than one village and sequestered hamlet, suddenly, at the top of a steep hill, there burst into view a much wider prospect than any previously. On one side rose high hills, in some parts clad with rich green verdure, in others, rising in rocky crags of sandy aspect; while to the left, beyond and below the slope of fields and woods, among which were many houses interspersed, was stretched the wide expanse of open sea, dotted with white sails, and sparkling in the evening sun, as Lionel caught his first glimpse of it from the brow of the hill.

A few minutes more, and the four horses had dashed down the descent, passing several gateways and cottages, as well as a pretty little church by the way; and after sweeping through the hollow, and round the base of a steep rising ground, thickly covered with shrubs and brushwoods, the coachman drew up at the corner of a narrow lane, leading up a hill; where, after exchanging sundry

graphic signs with a very dignified-looking man in plain livery and white hair, who stood apparently waiting for some arrival, he said to Lionel that his journey was at an

ery speedily the latter alighted, all his romances in a moment driven to the winds by stern reality of present appearances. Accustomed to the simplicity and freedom of a comely retired country life, the formal gravity of attendant's civilities, added to the embarrassment of a first arrival among strangers, somewhat awed Lionel, who followed the man silently as he approached, which was shaded by trees and thickly strewn with their fallen leaves.

At the top of the ascent, the house, a long, oblong-shaped building, appeared to the left, partly concealed by some graceful lime-trees; and a wicket gate enclosed the carriage sweep, which led to wind round a small shrubbery to the principal entrance at the further end. But Lionel's horse turned off through a rustic wicket, and led him across a smooth lawn, adorned with beds of flowers, to a glass door, opening upon a verandah covered with creeping plants, which ran round the sides of the house, affording a pleasant

shade in summer, and shelter in the cold winds of winter.

The door here stood open, and the servant walked in, and hastily crossing a small ante-room, he shut another swing-door which apparently led to the staircase and outer-hall, an achievement, however, which he did not succeed in effecting, before Lionel's sharp eyes had descried several figures behind it, some bowing low, others curtseying, and one apparently leaping in the air.

Smiling to himself at the thought of the greeting he might soon expect, but in no ways disconcerted, Lionel went on as he was directed, along a passage and through another ante-room, where he was ushered into a larger apartment, furnished, like a drawing-room, with windows down to the ground, and looking out upon a more extensive lawn, below which was a terraced walk commanding a fine view of the rocks and sea.

The sight of these surroundings pleased Lionel, as recalling the favourite terrace at Eaglescrag; and the imposing servant having to his great relief disappeared, he was contemplating the prospect with considerable satisfaction, when footsteps were heard coming quickly along the gravel walk outside, and, in another minute, there stepped in-

to the room from the verandah, through one of the open windows, a gentleman in clerical dress, whom Lionel at once perceived to be his future preceptor, Mr Clifford.

Very different in appearance was the person now before him from the tutor his boyish imaginings had pictured. Knowing that he must not expect a companion, and almost playfellow, such as Eustace and he had found in their former teacher Mr Morton, the young assistant-minister at Eaglescrag ;—and being aware that Colonel St Clair's acquaintance with Mr Clifford had been of long standing, Lionel had fancied the latter to be at least as old as his father, and to be clad in a double armour of reserve and dignity.

Mr Clifford, on the contrary, though he had entered on middle-life, had certainly not passed beyond it; and his fair open countenance, and tall slight figure, gave the impression of even less than his real age; while the gentle expression and kindly smile with which he welcomed his new pupil, put the boy at his ease directly, and encouraged him to respond with his usual cordial frankness.

"I have often longed to see you, Lionel," he said, after the first inquiries were over, "but our

homes lie so far apart, it was not very easy to accomplish my wish. My old friend's letter—your father's letter—was quite an agreeable surprise to me.”

“ You knew my father a long time ago, then, I suppose, sir ? ” said Lionel.

“ Yes, very many years. I was not much older than you are now when I first saw him ; ” then laying his hand on Lionel's head, and brushing back the auburn curls that clustered over his forehead, Mr Clifford added, as if to himself, “ Very like ; yes, very like indeed ! ” an observation, which, though it highly gratified, at the same time a little surprised Lionel, as, in his home, he had never been generally considered to bear much personal resemblance to his father.

Still the allusion was pleasant in itself, and inclined him to be still more prepossessed in his tutor's favour ; and indeed it almost seemed to Lionel even at the time, and still more on looking back, as if there were something peculiar in the deep interest with which Mr Clifford, in this opening interview, regarded him.

The idea, succeeded as it quickly was by a variety of others, soon passed away from his mind for the moment ; but Lionel never alto-

gether lost sight of the thrill of pleasure he had felt in that affectionate reception, and subsequent events contributing to stamp the circumstance upon his memory, he often recurred to it in later days.

In the meanwhile, school life was to begin in earnest. A large bell rung, and was followed by the sound of numerous feet and many voices, proclaiming the entrance of Lionel's future companions into an adjoining room.

All was like a dream to the solitary boy for the first half-hour or so, when he found himself seated at a long table, substantially spread for tea, with Mr Clifford himself at one end, and at the other a youth of about nineteen, who seemed to be in the position of senior pupil, and to hold some authority among his schoolfellows, who were all much younger than himself.

For a little while the strange faces, and the murmur of boyish talk, were confusing; but gradually Lionel, finding his spirits improve greatly as his hunger was appeased, took courage to look round, and to observe the different members of the party.

Not including the senior pupil, there were ten boys besides himself, varying from the ages of

eight or nine to sixteen, most of them ordinarily pleasant happy-looking lads, with nothing specially remarkable in their looks or manner. Some, however, there were, who attracted Lionel's attention considerably, though each in a different way. Opposite to him sat a boy of about fifteen, whose handsome features and sharp eye at first took his fancy; but upon closer observation, there was a coldness of expression in his clear-cut profile and scornful smile, which did not seem to augur well for the probability of his turning out a true friend.

Lionel turned with more satisfaction towards a somewhat younger boy, who sat next the former one, and who, under an assumed gravity of countenance, evidently concealed an abundant stock of drollery and humour, as might be discovered from the twinkle of his dark eyes and his occasional roguish smile. Though very different in some respects, Lionel could not help thinking there was a likeness between this boy and the one he had met in the steamer, and it turned out afterwards that his surmise was correct, Edwin Temple and Morgan Lewis being cousins.

Two boys, however, who occupied seats at the *further* end of the table, interested Lionel at first

most more than any one present. One youngest of the party, a rather delicate-child, of not more than eight years old, whose lustrous eyes had been fixed inquiringly on the new-comer during the whole of the meal—a survey which seemed to be very try to himself, as was evinced by the remarks he confided from time to time to his companion, a tall slight boy of about the same age, in whose countenance genius and beauty were strikingly marked, blended with a gentleness and sweetness of expression. His voice, too, was lower and softer than most of the fellows, and altogether there was an air about him which was very pleasant—which greatly inclined Lionel to like him. Mr. Ford, addressing this boy by the name of Henry Delamere—did his best to make the meal cheerful, by asking him some questions regarding the cricketing of the new season, in which sport Delamere seemed to be considered one of the principal leaders. It was a topic on which Lionel felt quite competent, having excelled in it in Scotland; and he began to show his interest by joining in the conversation in a way which elicited several

covert murmurs of pretended astonishment from his opposite neighbours.

Nothing further was said openly in Mr Clifford's presence; but after tea, a few minutes' liberty were allowed, and the senior pupil having followed his tutor out of the room, the others gathered round the bay-window, into the recess of which Lionel had betaken himself, and an attack upon the stranger began by Edwin Temple's marching gravely up to him, and saying, with a low bow, "I beg pardon for curiosity; but might we be favoured with the knowledge of at least *one* of your honour's titles!—whichever you prefer;—laird! or chief!—or even a humbler designation might answer the purpose—Donald, Dougal, Duncan!—any or all—only say!"

Lionel, recollecting the timely warning of his friend Lewis, was on his guard. He merely laughed in reply, and said, "I leave that to you to find out."

But Temple was not to be discomfited. "Find out!" he exclaimed. "Find out a chieftain's name! Must I traverse the land, and climb to the highest peak of his native mountains, and there call upon his clan to gather, in order to proclaim the name of Duncan? Could any one

have supposed such a thing to be expected of me?"

A general laugh ensued, in which Lionel could not help joining; but little Alfred Montagu, the youngest, who was looking much mystified by Temple's proceedings, said very gravely, "I know his name quite well, Edwin. It isn't Duncan. I heard Mr Clifford call him Lionel."

"Lionel! My child! you don't say so!" returned Temple, springing on the table, to the imminent risk of the cups and plates. "Listen, every one here present. The age of chivalry has returned! A lion king has appeared amongst us! alighted, I might say, by magic, in the middle of our humble circle, bearing the majestic form of a Highland chief. Hurrah! Brothers, join with me in hailing such an era in our scholastic story!"

And thereupon such a din of voices arose as speedily brought the white-haired butler into the room, with many grave threats of instantly reporting them, if quietness were not restored.

The boys cared little for his interference, but they wished to continue their fun, and, the first outburst having subsided, Temple and Gerald Townsend, the boy whom Lionel had first re-

marked, carried it on by a series of questions to the latter, which, though put with the greatest air of interest, he was well aware were intended to entrap him for the general entertainment.

Bravely as he stood his ground, not being versed in that style of schoolboy wit, it was rather a relief to him when the bell once more rang, and the other boys being summoned to the school-room to prepare their lessons for Mouday, the senior pupil, whose name Lionel discovered to be Edward Beaumont, offered to help him in arranging his possessions in the corner of the dormitory he was to occupy, and then took him out on the lawn to look round for a few minutes before the evening closed in.

Children's voices sounded merrily, coming up the approach in the dim light.

"Ah!" said Edward Beaumont, "here come the young ones home from their pic-nic, and Mrs Clifford too, I declare."

And as he spoke, he ran forward to open the gate for a tall, still almost youthful-looking lady, who, with cheerful smiles and pleasant words, came through it, leading one little tired boy by the hand, and followed by a nurse with a baby in her arms, while two elder children, a girl and

oy, whose spirits seemed in no degree inclined to flag, came frolicking behind, as if unwilling to see their day's pleasure come to an end.

"Well, Edward," Mrs Clifford said, "I dare say you are surprised at our being so late : were you coming out to look for us?"

"Not exactly, ma'am," was the reply. "I was showing St Clair some of our haunts, and we heard your voices."

A kind welcome to Lionel followed, and many enquiries as to his journey and arrival ; while the children clung round Edward Beaumont, eager to recount the adventures of their pic-nic.

"I cannot believe it, Violet," was his laughing rejoinder to the little girl's assurances of how delightful everything had been. "I don't know about Johnnie, he is a stony-hearted fellow ; but I am sure you have been thinking all day how much better it would have gone off if you had only asked me."

"Oh now, Mr Beaumont!" exclaimed Violet, "when I asked you so very, very often to come, instead of papa, and you would not! Mamma, didn't I?"

"Yes, indeed," returned Mrs Clifford, playfully. "I am afraid Edward is fishing for a

compliment ; you must invite this new friend next time, Violet," she added, turning kindly to Lionel.

As the latter looked into the fair face of the gentle child who now drew nearer to him, he was reminded for a moment of his own little sister Emily ; but Violet Clifford, though younger, was taller for her age, and much more slim and fairy-like in appearance than the hardy little Highland maiden. Nor had Violet Emily's bright exuberance of childish beauty, nor her glowing looks of health and strength : this little one's chief charm lay in the exquisite fairness of her delicate complexion, and soft pink colour, and in the extreme purity and sweetness of her expression.

" We often go on pic-nic parties in summer," she said, half timidly, though very gracefully offering her hand to Lionel, " but papa says this must be the last of the season, so I am afraid it will be a long time before we have another."

" O Violet !" said Edward Beaumont, " that is not half an invitation ; you need me to help you still, I see."

But Lionel seemed quite pleased and gratified by the notice he had received ; the children's *gaiety* and chatter put him almost more at his

ease than anything else could have done. And when, as they all entered the house together, Violet and Johnnie whispered something to their mother, and the latter, turning to Edward Beaumont, told him to bring the stranger into the parlour to supper with him for this evening, he felt at home, and among friends, to an extent he had little thought to do, so soon after the parting which had filled him with so much dismay a few short days before.

In the domestic circle at Seaview Lodge, Lionel's attractive manners and genial nature soon made him a favourite; and the day following his arrival being Sunday, when Mr Clifford's habit was to make his pupils part of the family, there was but little opportunity afforded on that day for any further exhibition of schoolboy bearing.

Thus the entrance upon a new life, which had looked so formidable in anticipation, seemed to be opening more auspiciously than could have been hoped for. Even young Lewis, when he arrived early on Monday morning, and claimed the right to be Lionel's first friend, was surprised to find how well the latter had already dropped into his place, and how soon his companions

LIONEL ST CLAIR.

ared to have desisted from their attacks upon

it remained to be seen whether this quiescence
their part was genuine ; but the lull was so
r good in the meanwhile, that it brought out
Lionel's usual flow of spirits, and inclined him to
join with his natural enthusiasm in the amuse-
ments of the playground, among which, with the
approach of winter, football was beginning to
take its place.

Not that Eaglescrag and its charms were for-
gotten : in quiet moments, it might be of inter-
vals of leisure in hours of study, or when
wandering over the rocks and shingle on holiday
afternoons ; or, more frequently than at any
other time, ere falling asleep at night, Lionel had
many tender reminiscences of home, on which he
pondered ; many longings for the first letter to
arrive ; many surmises as to what Eustace and
Emily were about in Edinburgh ; many recollec-
tions of the old tower and the rocky beach, and
winding paths ; of Jem Douglas and Ned Hard-
ing ; and many fond thoughts of the paternal
love which had made the sunshine of his child-
hood, of Aunt Lily and Tom, and even of Baby
Arthur, in their Highland retreat.

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Nothing of all this, however, appeared externally. Lionel, though very simple and open-hearted with the few who knew him best, was yet reserved and sensitive on matters of feeling with people in general, and no one who had seen his bright face, or heard his joyous laugh in his hours of recreation, would have at all guessed what was the bent of his most private reflections.

The unusual exertion, besides, which he was obliged to put forth in his studies, in order to keep up with his companions, was of great service in strengthening his mind. Owing to his chiefly home training, he found himself, in many particulars of classical learning, a good deal behind those of his own age, though by no means so in general knowledge ; and he felt, in consequence, that if he were to excel, much greater assiduity and much more close application were needful than he had ever given to his lessons before leaving home. Notwithstanding this, however, he received much encouragement from the good opinion expressed by Mr Clifford, both of his talents and capacity, and also of the manner in which he had been taught hitherto.

In good heart, therefore, and spurred on by

the hope of giving pleasure to all at home, Lionel set to work in right earnest; and his schoolfellows soon discovered, rather to their surprise, that however unsophisticated he might be in the ways of the world, he was a competitor by no means to be despised in the paths of scholarship.

CHAPTER VII.

LETTERS FROM FAR AND NEAR.

THE first real storm of winter had fallen upon the neighbourhood of Eaglescrag. After several weeks of bright and unusually mild weather for the time of year, a few days of sharp frost and intense cold had been followed by high biting winds, and dark ominous-looking clouds, resting on and overshadowing the now bleak and rugged mountains; and at last, early in the morning of the 10th of December, a heavy fall of snow began to descend so thickly and violently, that, before the afternoon, though the wind had abated and the air become somewhat warmer, the ground was completely enveloped in its white covering, and few persons ventured out-of-doors who could avoid it.

Among others, John Douglas, the fisherman, who was by no means very strong, had not left his cottage that day; the steps leading up to it

were nearly hidden by several inches depth of snow, and, though little Colin had done his best to sweep it away, and had so far succeeded as to make a path for his own little feet to jump up and down to the beach, yet, as the evening approached, and the snow began to harden with the returning frost, the work was rather too heavy, either for him or his father; so that when the last ray of sunlight had disappeared, and the stars began to twinkle out in the dark blue sky, father, mother, and child, gathered round the peat fire, and began eagerly to discuss their usual topic of conversation at such times—indulging in many conjectures as to Jem's whereabouts, and in sundry reckonings as to when his next letter could arrive.

On this evening, Colin, whose interest had been greatly excited of late by his first lessons in geography at the village school, produced a small map of America, which had been lent to him by one of his schoolfellows, in order to try to discover the name of the port whither Jem's ship had been ultimately bound ere starting from home. The map was carefully unfolded, and spread out upon the table between Colin and *his* father, whose heads were soon bending over

it in close proximity ; and, between the partially imperfect sight of the one, and the considerably imperfect reading of the other, the process of investigation promised to be sufficiently slow to afford them amusement for the rest of the evening.

Mrs Douglas sat by, busy with her knitting, and smiling contentedly as she watched the close attention with which the pair pursued their search; while, from time to time, she interposed remarks of her own, which, if they did not go far to solve the difficulty, served, at least, to indicate how deeply her sympathies were engaged in the subject.

"R-I-O, father, here it is!" exclaimed Colin, joyfully, as he at length spied the name Rio del Janeiro in the very smallest of letters ; "this is one place Jem told us about. I ken it is, father, he made us spell it—look!"

"Ay, ay, laddie," said the father, examining the map more closely, "I fancy you're right, but it's a queer outlandish sort of a name."

Colin laughed merrily—"O father, that isn't all of it, there's more here; let's see," and he was proceeding with great deliberation to spell the next word, when he was interrupted by a gentle knock at the door of the cottage.

"Who can that be, on such a night as this?"

said John, getting up. "Stop, laddie, I'll open the door mysel'. What, wee Katie! is it you? without your mother!—come in, come in, bairn, you must be half frozen."

"No, I'm not frozen," replied Kate's little gentle voice, so like her mother's; "the doctor brought me across the moor in his gig. Mother wouldn't have sent me, only"—

"Never mind that, dearie, get yourself warmed first, and then you'll tell us," said Mrs Douglas, in her kindly tones, as she drew the shivering child into the warmth of the chimney corner, and took off the plaid which had been carefully wrapped round her. "Now, Colin, run for some logs of wood, like a good boy, and we will make a blaze for Katie, which will cheer her up in no time. Poor lamb! she's just shaking with the cold. Sure you're never thinking to go back by yourself, my dear."

"No," replied Kate, "mother thought maybe you would keep me till morning, Mrs Douglas, please, like you did once before, and if I wouldn't be troubling you."

"Trouble, indeed! what trouble would you be, my own wee Katie? There, now, you're looking *more like yourself!*" said the tender mother, as,

panding under the genial glow, the little girl's flour returned, and her voice grew steadier.

"I came with this," she said, drawing a letter from within the folds of her little dress. "The postman gave it to mother to-day. The storm made the post very late, and he had not time to come on here; so he left it with us, and mother thought it was from Jem, and you would like to have it."

"Well, that's welcome news, and maybe there's one from Ned inside, who knows!" said Mrs Douglas, patting Kate's head as she handed the letter to her husband.

"Mother thought Jem might have seen Ned hereaway," was the timid rejoinder; while Colin, his attention completely diverted from his map, came, with his blue eyes wide open, to stand close to his father's side in eager expectation.

The letter, accordingly, was duly opened, and the parents' eyes gladdened by a few lines in Jem's clear bold handwriting. But there were, besides, two enclosures, one of which had been evidently addressed so hastily as to be scarcely legible from blots, though John Douglas with some difficulty made out that it was intended for Mrs Harding, and the other, which had been

securely wafered up, was directed, in Jem's own hand, to Master St Clair.

"That'll be for Mr Lionel," said John, laying the packet carefully on one side. "You'd best see to it, wife; and now we'll hear what Jem says."

And, to satisfy the impatience of his wife and child, John, in slow measured tones, read the letter aloud :—

"NEW YORK, *November 12th.*

"DEAR FATHER,—I have only a few minutes to write to you and mother and little Colin; but I know you will all be wearying for some word from the sea. Well, mother, I got safe into port yesterday morning, and am to be off again to-morrow, or thereabouts. We had a fine voyage across the Atlantic, never a bit of wind to call a storm the whole way: I enjoyed it fine. I like our captain real well; he is a capital sailor, and a fine hand at keeping order and the like; and I can see he is a much more serious sort of a man than my last captain was. He gathered us all together on the Sabbaths, and had worship with us, every one who could be spared was there; and they all seemed well enough pleased. So I think, father, you'll like that. Our ship is much larger and more roomy than the one I was in before; and I

ve a snug little shelf above my berth where other's Bible lies, and my hymn-book and lgrim's Progress the lady gave me, so there'll no excuse for me if I don't keep my promise to ad them. I put in a nail to keep them steady if e wind blew, but we have been quite quiet so far.

"New York seems a very fine town, all I have en of it. Long wide streets, and grand houses, id lots of trees too; but I have not got much here. I wish Ned Harding had been among . I'm fearing he's got among rather a wild t—leastways, they're aye laughing and making n; but maybe mother would say they're none e worse of that. They got here near a week fore us, and I met Ned all of a sudden in the reet yesterday. He looked awfully taken a-ck when he saw me, and I could get little out him; but he came down at night with this bit e for his mother, which, please, give her, and say was well and jolly, and if I meet him at Rio, ll do my best for him. He threw me this other e, too, just as he was going off, which he said as for the young gentleman; so I have directed to Mr Lionel, and I daresay Mr St Clair will nd it to him at his school.

"Dear mother, my kind love to you as you sit

by your fireside. Colin will be getting all the fine scones and cakes ; but never mind, there's a good time coming yet ! and when Colin goes out to make ropes next harvest, maybe I'll be there to cut for him. Don't none of you be feared for me.

“The boat is just going away, so, with best respects to all friends, no more at present, dear father and mother and brother, from your loving son,—
JEM.”

It were vain to attempt to describe the joy spread through the cottage home by this simple epistle. How many times it was read over, how often Colin asked to have it repeated, how the map was again resorted to to ascertain the exact locality of New York, how the parents expatiated upon each particular contained in it to each other, long after Colin and little Kate were fast asleep, and how the first thought next morning in all their minds was of Jem and his doings in that distant land.

Even Katie, though in her heart, poor child, she had, ever since taking Ned's letter into her hand, been secretly longing to run home and share it with her mother, evidently took a most *lively interest* in listening to Jem's, the frank,

merriment of the sailor boy having ever him a favourite among his juniors ; while any way in which John Douglas and his talked freely of their son, and all that could him, before their little visitor, showed thoroughly they considered her at home ; them.

was true that their tenderness to the poor fatherless girl was something more than ordinary compassion ; there was a deeper element and the secret of this probably lay, not in the fact of the long friendship of the friends on both sides, and in Mrs Harding and Douglas having been much brought in connection with the family of St Clair, also in the circumstance (which, in some cases, might have had exactly the contrary effect) that she constantly recalled to them the memory of an only daughter of their own, who died many years before this time, and very young after Kate was born. The remembrance of their little Mary in her childhood's bloom, heightened as it was by the sad charm with which nature paints the flowers early transplanted to a foreign clime, doubly endeared the somewhat dear child to their kindly-disposed hearts, and

many of Katie's happiest and merriest hours were spent under the roof of the hospitable little cottage on the rock.

A few days after those letters had arrived to impart so much pleasure at Eaglescrag, Lionel, in the far South, was one evening finishing his lessons for next day, in great haste, in the school-room at Seaview Lodge.

In general, this was a very quiet business. Whatever difficulties Lionel might find in his work, he seldom spoke of them; but on this particular evening, nothing seemed to go right. His books were missing, his ink running dry, his pens bad, and even his face did not look quite so good-humoured as usual.

"What's wrong, St Clair?" said Morgan Lewis, who sat next him, as Lionel, for the third time, uttered an exclamation of impatience. "Can you not manage those verses yet?"

"Oh yes," replied Lionel, without looking up; "the verses are well enough, but I want to get done."

"He wants to read his letters," said one of the younger boys, rather a stupid little fellow, who having, according to his own ideas, finished his lessons, was spending his time in leaning on the

desk, gazing vacantly at all that went on ; “ I saw him get a lot.”

“ And so did I,” said another boy of the name of Meredith, who had joined the school shortly after Lionel’s own arrival ; “ they’re from his clan, asking him to appoint a place of meeting—a tryst. They don’t know which hill to choose, because the snow’s so deep the hills are not to be seen at all.”

“ Like the Welsh ones, I suppose,” Lionel replied, still bending over his desk. But as Meredith made a feint of rushing at him, he looked up, and, more sharply than was usual with him, said, “ Keep off, now ! I won’t have you meddling here !”

“ Ho ! ho !” said Gerald Townsend, coming with a bound from the other end of the room, “ the lion is turning savage ; you had better look out, Meredith.”

“ You mind your own business, Townsend,” said Lewis, standing so that neither of the boys could reach Lionel’s desk ; “ Meredith’s able enough to stand up for himself.”

Lionel, however, being really anxious to finish his work, and knowing that any uproar would only retard it, made an effort to recover his good-

humour, and, finding his surest refuge in silence, he vouchsafed no further reply to the witticisms of the boys, which soon had the effect of inducing them to leave him to himself, and to cluster round the schoolroom stove, where jostling each other to get the benefit of the heat afforded them ample amusement for some time.

Half-an-hour's interval was allowed before supper, and Lionel, having accomplished his task, and replaced his books on his own shelf, quietly left the room, and repaired to a small parlour on the ground-floor, where the boys kept their best caps and cloaks and greatcoats, and where, owing to the dampness of the weather, there was this evening a fire burning.

Crouching down upon the rug before the glowing flames, Lionel proceeded to draw from his pocket two letters, both addressed to himself, one in Colonel St Clair's handwriting, and the other in that of his brother Tom.

The former was open, as he had already glanced at it, and he now read it through :—

“EDINBURGH, *December 16th.*

“MY DEAR BOY LIONEL,—You do not often get a letter from me, but I must send you a few

words to-day. It has been a great pleasure and amusement to me to receive your nice long letters, and to hear such good accounts of you, both from yourself, and also from Mr Clifford. I am afraid you will not think what I have to say now a very suitable reward for your diligence in writing, and your good behaviour generally. It grieves me much to disappoint you, but, my dear, I find it will not do for you to come home this Christmas. The journey is so long, and the time you would have to remain so short, that I have, though most unwillingly, decided, that as Mr Clifford is kind enough to keep you, you had better remain with him during the vacation. He tells me there are three or four other boys to do the same, so that I hope you may not be very dull ; and I have made a condition that you shall be free to choose your own employments, so that you may have a complete holiday.

“The disappointment is nearly as great to me as it will be to you, for I miss you sadly, my boy, as a companion ; but you must believe that I cannot help it, and I know you will try to bear it manfully ; if you do, you shall not be unrewarded.

“Ada tells me to say, with her love, that she

does not approve of this arrangement at all, and considers it the act of a tyrant. To make up for it, she is going to send you no end of good things in a box, which will appear in a few days.

“Eustace and Emily are both well, and, so far as I see, busy with their lessons; but they miss you very much, especially Emily.

“I must close this letter abruptly, as I have nearly made it too late for the post.

“Ever, my dear boy, with my kindest love,—
“PAPA.”

With a deep sigh, and an unmistakeable look of chagrin, which he could not repress, Lionel turned from this letter, and slowly opened the other. Within the envelope was an enclosure, which dropped out, and he did not at first observe it.

“EAGLESCRAG TOWER, *December 14th.*

“DEAR LIONEL,—Your jolly letter, giving an account of your journey, and a description of Seaview, &c., deserved an earlier reply. We were very glad to get it, but you know my inclinations do not tend towards correspondence, much as I like to hear from you. However, now I must tell you that we are all flourishing

here in your absence, notwithstanding the cold, which at present is something wonderful, especially to us foreigners. It seems to agree with Arthur, who grows apace. He is running about on his own feet now, and in mischief, accordingly, from morning to night. Julia evidently considers it my paternal duty to guarantee him against all mishaps, so that you can well understand my hands are full.

“There is little doing on the place; the snow has put a stop to all our operations. We cut down a good deal of wood before the storm came on. I was quite at home in that, and astonished the men considerably by my handling of the axe; and since we have been snowed in, it has been capital exercise chopping up the fallen trees into small logs for firewood. I had it brought into your workshop, and there I chop away famously, with Arthur squatted at a respectful distance among the chips.

“Aunt Lily is coming to stay with us for a week at Christmas. I hope the change may be good for her, and I am sure her company will be good for us. She reproaches me for not sooner writing to you, but I tell her one of her letters is worth a dozen of mine; she also thinks it hard

measure that you are not to be down for the holidays, and I too am very sorry. I would have sent for you here, if I could, but there is great risk of either not arriving, or not getting away again, at this season. So cheer up, old fellow, we shan't forget you, never fear.

"I had a visit from Mrs Douglas and little Kate Harding yesterday morning. It was quite a treat to see Mary's cheery face again. They brought me this note from Ned to you ; it came enclosed in Jem's letter. I rather fear, from what I could gather, that poor Ned is not much of a comfort yet.

"Now, Leo, I must tell you, that after many weeks of indecision, I plucked up courage, and began the class last Sunday. It was rather an unfortunate day for a commencement, being intensely cold, and the wind tremendously high, forestalling the snow, which began to fall in the night ; but I was quite satisfied with the success as to numbers : there were ten ; six fisher lads, and four younger boys, and that was more than I expected the first day. We met in the laundry, with a glorious fire, which seemed to please them very much. Next time, I shall take their names, which, I *daresay*, you would have known without asking.

"It is wonderful what cowards men are—or at least, some men—about such things. I assure you, Leo, I never felt half so frightened on a lion-hunt, as I did when I first began to speak to those lads on Sunday afternoon. Happily, they were not aware of the folly of their teacher, and did not seem nearly so much afraid of me ; so that I am in hopes, when we are better acquainted, we may get on pretty well together. I shall ask Mr Morton to look in some evening and give them an address. The old minister is very weak and ill just now ; Morton seems anxious about him.

"Now, I declare, this has turned out a tolerably long letter, after all ; you must accept it for want of better, and write to me again before long. Julia sends her love and good wishes for Christmas and New-Year, and whenever there is anything new to tell you about the class, or otherwise, I will let you know. Meanwhile, dear Lionel, I am ever yours most affectionately,—

"Tom."

Lionel was highly delighted with this letter—it showed him that Tom had not forgotten him, of which he had been becoming somewhat appre-

hensive, and all the little details of winter life at Eaglescrag were full of interest to him. He read it over so often, that only a few minutes remained, before the ringing of the bell, for the perusal of Ned Harding's roughly-folded little note. Lionel opened it without much anxiety as to its contents, though wondering a little in his own mind what Ned could possibly have to say to him ; but when his eye fell upon the three or four lines of which alone it consisted, he discovered that it was not intended for himself, but for Eustace. It ran as follows :—

“MR YEWSTACE—

“SIR,—I asked at a many people at the place they call York for the one you know of, but I could not find him out nohow. We're off to Rio, and I'll try again there. Hopes you'll excuse bad writing. Remains, sir, your obedient servant,—

EDWARD HARDING.”

The mysterious tenor of this little document produced a most beneficial effect upon Lionel, by completely diverting his mind, for the moment, from the unwelcome tidings he had that evening received.

“What could it mean?” he thought to himself. “Who could Eustace be wishing to discover out there, when he himself had never left Scotland since he was brought home a baby from the West Indies twelve years ago; and then Eustace never cared much about other countries, or anything of the kind?”

It was most perplexing; Lionel pondered deeply over the matter, but could discover no clue to its solution; and happily for his peace of mind it never occurred to him that Eustace’s altered manner, during their last days together at home, could have any connection with his private dealings with Ned. He decided at length that the only thing to be done was to enclose the letter to his brother at once. Colonel St Clair, he knew, would ask no questions as to the subject of his boys’ correspondence; and he hoped that, with the prospect of a yet longer separation than they had expected before them, Eustace would readily resume his old habits of confidence, and himself unravel the mystery in his next letter from Edinburgh.

Just as Lionel arrived at this hopeful conclusion, he heard the summons to supper. Hastily thrusting all the letters into the inner pocket of

his jacket, he ran along the passage, and sprang up the short flight of steps which led to the hall, just as the other boys were flocking in from another door. Some special jokes among themselves seemed to be engrossing their attention; and as Lionel entered the room along with them, no notice was taken, either by his companions or by Mr Clifford, of his temporary absence.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS.

BREAKING-UP day arrived ; prizes were distributed, boxes packed, places in the early coach secured, breakfast by candle-light discussed and laughed over by the intending travellers ; and almost before the sun had sent forth a single ray, the well-known vehicle for Ryde rattled off from the entrance to Seaview Lodge, piled up with every variety of luggage, and resounding with the voices of the merry boys who, crowded together, filled the inside seats.

The little group left behind stood with somewhat rueful faces, returning, with all the cheerfulness they could assume, the parting salutations of their companions ; but when the coach had finally disappeared round the corner, and they turned to go back to the house in the cold chill twilight, each one seemed to look more discon-

solate than another, so that even the grave butler Wilmot, who had been superintending the departure, was moved to some compassion.

"You mustn't be down-hearted," he volunteered to say, as the party were walking with unusual gravity up the hill; "them winter weeks goes real fast at times."

Lionel, notwithstanding his despondency, could not help laughing at this kindly attempt at consolation. "Ah, but I'm afraid this won't be one of the times, Wilmot," he said; "I feel as if to-day would be awfully slow and long."

"So do I. I—I wish I had not got up," said Gerald Townsend, with a loud yawn; "I have a good mind to go to bed again."

"Never too late to mend, my dear," rejoined Edwin Temple, following his schoolfellow's example in a yawn, which ended in a prolonged howl; "I shall have the greatest pleasure in hushing you to sleep, if you don't mind going without your breakfast. Clifford's down, mind; he took a fatherly leave of those chaps. Morgan was nearly lost in his embrace! Hollo! here's a go!"


The concluding exclamation was uttered in a low voice, and was elicited by the sight of Mr

Clifford himself in much closer proximity than Edwin had any idea of. Whether or not he had overheard the latter observations he took no notice of them, but smiled good-humouredly as his pupils came up to him, and told them to come in for prayers directly, and that breakfast would then be ready for all together in the parlour, instead of in the hall as usual.

"What a bore!" whispered Gerald Townsend to Meredith, who was next to him; "that's because Beaumont's away! I just hate that parlour breakfast!"

What cannot be cured, however, must be endured, and Gerald, not having been consulted as to the arrangements for the morning meal, was obliged to take up his lot with the rest; and to Lionel and Henry Delamere, and even to Edwin Temple, though he pretended the contrary, there was some enlivenment in the happy looks of the family circle, and in the lively flow of conversation carried on by Mr and Mrs Clifford.


Violet, having been allowed, in honour of the holidays, to arrange where every one should sit, had taken up her own position between Lionel and Henry Delamere, while Johnnie attached himself to Edwin Temple, with whom he kept up a



series of whispered remarks during the whole of breakfast-time.

And now began a new phase of school experience for Lionel. In the months that had passed since his first arrival at Seaview, there had indeed been a good deal of teasing and quizzing indulged in at his expense, and he had often been on the verge of getting into trouble in consequence ; but where there were so many to engage in such attacks, they were only made upon the impulse of the moment, by fits and starts, and trifles often diverted them from one to another.

Thus Lionel had fallen into the way of parrying them very much upon impulse too ; and though in many cases this was the best way, yet the tendency was beginning to tell upon his general character in more important respects. He had resolved, from an earnest wish to please his father, to make the best of everything, and to enjoy his present life so far as he could ; and in great measure he had succeeded. But he had not hitherto quite faced the truth that there were some difficulties likely to meet him which could not be overcome merely by such a determination. Lionel had yet to learn that he must make a decided choice between good and evil, if, when circumstances



brought the latter element directly to bear upon him, he was to stand firm.

The incidents of these holidays were in some degree to teach him by experience the truth of this.

Till now, Lionel's companions in their sleeping apartment had been Morgan Lewis, Edwin Temple, and little Alfred Montagu ; but at this time Mrs Clifford, partly to save trouble during the vacation, and partly to make a little variety for the boys, proposed that Lionel, Gerald Townsend, and Meredith, should share one room, while Henry Delamere and Edwin Temple should occupy what was generally Edward Beaumont's, and that little Hugh Fitzgerald, the youngest of the party remaining, should be put, for the time, with Johnnie Clifford, in his little room near the nursery.

On first hearing of the contemplated change, Lionel rather liked the idea ; for though both Townsend and Meredith had many ways which were distasteful to him, yet they were both very clever and amusing, and could tell many stories of life very different from anything he had ever known before.

Mr Clifford, however, when the proposal was

laid before him, entirely negatived it, so far as Lionel's destination was concerned ; and it was accordingly settled at last that Lionel and Henry Delamere should be together, and Edwin Temple, with the others, in the larger room.

It did not seem to Lionel to matter much, and he rather wondered that his tutor should think it of any importance. He had always liked Henry Delamere, and was not sorry to become better acquainted with him ; but he had fancied that Townsend's liveliness would be refreshing, especially just now, when his own spirits were at an unusually low ebb. His letters from home had been very few and very short, he thought ; Ada's promised box had not yet arrived ; Eustace had written, but had merely mentioned having received Ned Harding's letter, without giving any explanation of its meaning ; and an expected letter from Aunt Lily was still in the future. Altogether, Lionel was disposed to be dull and listless, and though at meal-times he tried to avoid letting this appear, Mr Clifford was too quick of perception not to observe the change in him.

The weather, too, for a day or two, was very bad, and kept the boys chiefly within doors ; so that the first Sunday arrived before anything had

occurred to shed more brightness over their rather lugubrious holidays.

On this Sunday afternoon, after dinner, they were all together in the schoolroom. They had been to church in the morning, and were to go again in the evening; and Mr Clifford, having agreed to preach for a neighbouring clergyman in the afternoon, had taken his own family with him, and left his pupils for once alone, with the easy task of finding and writing out half-a-dozen texts on a subject he had given them, and with the one injunction of order and quietness. A few books and prints had also been left for their entertainment, so that there seemed to be no excuse for their not spending a pleasant afternoon.

No sooner, however, had the carriage containing Mr and Mrs Clifford disappeared, than Gerald Townsend, who had been sitting at his own desk at the farther end of the table from Meredith, changed his seat, and came next the latter; and though for a short time both appeared to be engaged in writing their texts, Lionel perceived, by their half-suppressed laughter, and their murmured remarks, that some joke or other was being mixed up with their employment.

“What’s that you’re up to, you two?” said

Edwin Temple at last, on seeing Townsend hold up a paper towards Meredith; "I wish you would be quiet. It's forbidden, Meredith, mind, while we are at our texts."

"No fear," replied Townsend, "you attend to your texts, Temple, and leave us to ours." Silence ensued for a few minutes; then little Hugh, who had gone round to beg for some assistance from Lionel, exclaimed, as he passed, "It's pictures, St Clair! they're drawing pictures, such funny ones too, on little cards! But that's naughty, isn't it, out of the Bible?"

"I'll soon teach you what's naughty, if you don't hold your tongue," said Townsend, in a voice of pretended threatening, which made Hugh run back to Lionel with all speed.

At the same time, Edwin Temple got up to look over Meredith's shoulder, and next moment all three were in fits of laughing over the production of Townsend's pen.

"Just let's finish the texts," said the latter, "and I'll show you what a jolly game we can have with these. I've got the whole set here, and we did it nearly every Sunday last winter. Clifford 'll be a long time yet."

Edwin looked doubtful as to the expediency of

this proposal, and Henry Delamere said nothing. Lionel glanced at him, as if expecting him to speak, but was also silent. In about a quarter of an hour all the texts were finished.

"Now," said Townsend, "Mr Clifford said we might do what we liked after our texts were done; come away, Hughie, you sit next me, and I'll show you how to play."

Hugh was not altogether satisfied, but he was taken with the idea of a game; and Townsend, having succeeded in placing him beside himself, proceeded to explain to him how it was to be played.

"Oh yes, I see," remarked Hugh, "just like quartettes."

"Oh no, Hugh, not like quartettes," said Townsend, "because it's all about people and things in the Bible: quartettes are never taken from the Bible. Now, look, I've got these counters besides the cards. Temple, I'll give you yours; and Delamere, here are some for you."

"Thank you, I am not going to play; and, Townsend, you know Mr Clifford was very angry about it last year," said Henry Delamere, getting up from the table, and taking one of the books

which were lying about, with which he stretched himself very comfortably upon the rug in front of the fire.

Townsend looked somewhat astonished at his tone of cool decision.

"Well, never mind," he said, "we have enough without him. Here, St Clair."

But Lionel, though he sat irresolute, did not take the cards and counters held out to him. "I don't know," he at length said; "I had rather not play if Mr Clifford does not like us to do it."

"Oh, don't play if you're afraid—don't, by all means," observed Meredith, a remark which he fully expected to decide Lionel in favour of the game at once. It had, however, exactly the contrary effect.

"I am no more afraid than you are," Lionel replied, turning away from the table; "but Mr Clifford trusted us, and I know we ought not to do it; and," he added, more hesitatingly, "I don't like those games on Sunday, besides."

"Oh, you don't! what a wonderfully good boy you are!" said Townsend, in a mocking tone; "perhaps you will not object to follow Delamere's example, and to take a book, while we less-enlight-

ened individuals indulge in a little innocent recreation. Now, Temple, we'll begin; four's a capital number."

Edwin looked rather graver than usual, and began a half remonstrance, "If it isn't allowed, Townsend"——

"That's only while we are at our texts; and this is holiday-time. Clifford's not so awfully strict; come on now."

And Edwin, against his better judgment, was persuaded to join in the game, and soon was laughing over it as merrily as any of his companions.

Lionel, in the meanwhile, having discovered, to his great joy, one of his most favourite books among those left for their selection, seated himself in the window-seat to enjoy its contents; and except that his eyes wandered oftener than might be wished towards the table, he took no further notice of the transactions there carried on.

Thus nearly an hour passed, and so interested had the players become in their game (which had been chiefly invented by Townsend, and exhibited considerable cleverness), that they were led into prolonging it beyond the bounds of prudence.

Some dispute at length arose between Meredith and Temple, which greatly excited the indignation of both; and the altercation between them was so loud, that though Lionel, notwithstanding his disapproval, sprang from the window to give them warning, Mr Clifford's carriage drove up unheard to the hall door.

Meredith's voice was still raised, and Edwin's brow cloudy, when their tutor's footsteps were heard coming along the passage. Townsend, in a great flutter, had only time to snatch at the cards with which they had been playing, and crush them up into his pocket, while he himself turned hastily towards the window before Mr Clifford opened the door; and, seeing all his pupils present, and apparently quiet, he greeted them kindly, and then, without the least suspicion of anything being wrong, he began to tell them about the service he had been conducting in a little inland and somewhat retired village.

Suddenly, however, his eye fell upon one of the little red counters which had been used in the game, and which Townsend in his haste had overlooked, having dropped on the floor.

"How did this come here to-day?" Mr Clifford said, picking it up; then looking at Lionel,

who happened to be next him, he continued, "I hope you have not been playing at any game, Lionel?"

"No, sir," replied Lionel, firmly, and raising his eyes so frankly to his tutor's face, that the latter could not doubt he was speaking truth; and with a smile of relief, Mr Clifford was about to resume his former subject of conversation, when Townsend, whose confusion only led him to damage his own cause, came forward and said, "The counter is mine, sir, I had it in my pocket; we were playing with them last night."

"Oh, to be sure, so you were," returned Mr Clifford, handing the counter across the table. But as he did so, he glanced at Townsend's countenance, the conscious expression of which struck him, and he added in a very serious tone, "I hope you are all to be trusted. I feel St Clair has spoken the truth; but remember, Townsend, truth, if it is genuine, must be acted as well as spoken."

A muttered "Yes, sir," was Townsend's only reply. He turned away towards the window, where he stood with his back to the rest of the party. Mr Clifford, however, did not take this as a convincing proof that he was deceiving him.

He was well acquainted with the boy's nature, and knew how his temper was apt to give way the moment he was even suspected of a fault; and not wishing either to irritate him, or to make any disturbance on a Sunday, he allowed the matter to rest for the present; and telling the boys to go to their rooms and prepare for tea directly, that they might be ready for the evening service, he left them.

Lionel did not wait to hear any remarks on what had passed, nor did Henry Delamere, who followed him out of the room.

"I was so glad Clifford asked you, St Clair," said the latter, as the two boys ran up-stairs together; "he might not have believed you if the other chaps had spoken first."

"But surely they would not have denied it?" said Lionel.

"Not Temple, if he had been asked himself directly. I wouldn't answer for Townsend; and as for Meredith, I don't know him so well. Gerald would do almost anything rather than own himself in the wrong."

"Oh, well, I hope it's blown over for this time," said Lionel, as he proceeded to brush his hair.

"*I say*, Delamere, I don't see the fun of such

tricks ; it isn't even like a lark over the rocks, or anything of that kind."

Delamere laughed, and said Lionel looked as wise as Solon when he made this comparison ; but the ringing of the bell, warning them to make haste, prevented any more being said just now.

The cloud, however, was not to disperse quite so quickly. Later in the evening, when the boys had returned from church, and all, except Lionel, who had lingered behind, were clustering together in the parlour, amusing themselves with the little ones, Mr Clifford came into the room, with a book in his hand, looking grave and concerned.

"Boys," he said, "which of you was sitting in the window-seat of the schoolroom this afternoon?"

At first no one spoke. Then little Fitzgerald said, "Please, sir, it was St Clair ; he was reading there."

"Yes, I suppose he was reading ; for I found his book lying there, where it ought not to have been. But what is this between the leaves?" and to the consternation of Temple and Hugh, who were nearest to him, Mr Clifford drew out one of the cards of Townsend's manufacture.

At this moment, Lionel, looking quite bright

and unconscious, came into the room talking merrily to Mrs Clifford, whom he had met on the staircase.

Mr Clifford turned to him at once with the card.

"Lionel," he said, "what does this mean? How did this card come to be in the book you were reading this afternoon?"

For an instant Lionel was thunderstruck; but when a few words of explanation had made the case clearer to him, his colour rose, his eyes sparkled, and he was just on the point of charging Townsend hotly with unfair dealing, when an expressive look from Delamere stopped him.

After a few minutes' pause, during which no one spoke, he said, "I don't know in the least what it means, sir. That card was not in my book when I was reading, and I have nothing to do with it."

Once more the tone and look of perfect sincerity almost convinced Mr Clifford of Lionel's integrity; he appealed to the others for explanation, but none was given. "This is very strange, Lionel," he said, at length. "You must know something of how the card came there; is it your own?"

"No, sir, I never saw it before. I have told you all I can."

"Well, I should be very sorry to doubt your word, but it seems mysterious, and I cannot help thinking you could tell me more if you chose; however, it is just prayer-time, so we will drop the subject for to-night. I shall speak to you again, Lionel, to-morrow morning."

Not another word passed Lionel's lips for the rest of the evening, till he was shut into his own room alone with Henry Delamere. Then his indignation, which till now had been every moment increasing, burst forth, though, perhaps fortunately for him, he was forced to speak in a low tone, lest he should be overheard.

"I declare," he said, "it's a downright shame. That Townsend is a regular swindler; I don't know what he deserves!"

And much more to the same effect Lionel gave utterance to. Delamere did not attempt to interrupt him, till at last he stopped for want, apparently, of any stronger word in which to express himself. Then Henry replied, "It's too bad, certainly. It's plain he must, in some way or other, have got that card slipped in after we came away!"

"And I wonder why!" said Lionel; "I never did him any harm. Why should he try to get me into a scrape?"

"Oh, I saw how that was. He was angry because Mr Clifford took your word and doubted him; he's a terribly resentful fellow, Townsend."

"Well, Mr Clifford might believe me now as well as then; it's a shame of him not. And if he sends for me to-morrow, I'll tell him so." Under cover of the darkness, Delamere smiled to himself at this magnanimous resolution; but he could not avoid remonstrating against what followed. "And if he doesn't believe me then, I'll just give him the whole story."

"No, no, St Clair, don't do that. Mr Clifford will never expect you to tell about any one but yourself; he never does. You keep firm to it, that you did nothing to deceive him, and the truth'll come out sooner or later; never fear."

"I don't know that. Clifford may just let it alone, and think I'm cheating him all the time; I won't put up with it. There is no reason why I shouldn't tell."

"You'll never hear the end of it, if you do," returned Delamere. "There's nothing here sends a fellow to Coventry more than carrying tales—

even if there were no better reason," he added in a lower tone, as if half afraid to hazard the remark.

But he need not have feared. Lionel became suddenly silent: those few concluding words of his companion's made more impression upon him than all that had been said before. Notwithstanding the comparative carelessness of the past months, and the sudden pride and anger which had been stirred up in his mind by the incidents of the evening, the germs of right and holy feeling, which too often of late had lain dormant, were not extinct; and this simple appeal to his conscience, from one so little older than himself, acted like a spark to rekindle them into life.

But the struggle was a hard one. Long after Delamere was asleep, Lionel lay awake, at first, in a tumult of excitement, burning with anger and resentment, which passions, however, gradually cooled down and melted away, as words of heavenly truth, learned in days gone by, rose up in his mind to quell the tempest of feeling.

In the stillness which reigned around, his thoughts, he hardly knew why, reverted to the little parlour at Woodbank, and to the favourite book of Bible illustrations, among which one in particular of the disciples in the storm on the Sea

of Galilee, seemed especially to dwell in his memory.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "I remember now what Aunt Lily said to me about that. I suppose this is one of my first storms."

And then, all at once, added to the recollection of that picture, came before his mind's eye the scene of the prodigal's return, which had always so deeply interested him; and amid the silence of night there arose from Lionel's heart a simple petition for forgiveness, and help to do right, which was not unheard by Him who, in that hour of darkness, had an eye and a heart of love for His weak and wavering child.

In general, Lionel woke in the morning as gay as a lark. Even in the dim light and chill air of December, his voice was usually to be heard in joyous song while he pursued his toilet; but on the morning after this eventful Sunday, he was almost entirely silent, and it was not till he was just on the point of leaving his room, that he turned to his companion, and said, "Well, Delamere, I've made up my mind to do as you said; but you'll stand by me, won't you? if it gets me into trouble."

"Trust me for that," replied Delamere, with a



smile so sweet and bright, it quite cheered Lionel to look at him. "But don't you be afraid, Clifford's awfully sharp; he'll see through it all in time, if you only have a little patience."

And so it turned out. During the course of the ensuing week, Lionel found that he had much need to exercise that same virtue of patience. Mr Clifford, indeed, after again appealing to him for an explanation, and only receiving the same answer as before, had appeared so far satisfied that he ceased to press the inquiry, and told Lionel that, for his own and his father's sake, he should hope and trust that he was sincere. But still the boy felt that there remained a lurking doubt of him in his tutor's mind, and he could not help perceiving, or at least fancying, that, subsequently, a shade of coolness appeared in the latter's manner towards him—an alteration to which Lionel was, perhaps, all the more sensitive, that, hitherto, Mr Clifford, out of school-hours, had treated him more like a son than a pupil, and had led him to be quite at home and at ease with himself personally.

Delamere did his best to console his companion in the privacy of their own apartment; and the misunderstanding, trying as it was, had

at least the good effect of bringing the two boys into a close intimacy, which was destined to ripen in after-years into a true and lasting friendship.

The arrival of the expected box, however, made a pleasant diversion, and contributed greatly to restore Lionel's equanimity. Many New-Year's gifts and stores of dainties were drawn forth from its recesses ; and as Lionel shared everything that was eatable with the rest of the party, even Townsend and Meredith began, at times, to look slightly ashamed of their ungenerous conduct.

Letters, too, came to hand ;—a long one from Ada, with elaborate descriptions of Edinburgh festivities and gaieties, which entertained Lionel excessively, without, at the same time, exciting in him the slightest desire to join in them ; a whole sheet, in half-text, from Emily, telling of a children's party, and wishing that Lionel had been there ; a few hurried lines from Eustace ; and, last of all, a delightful letter from Aunt Lily, full of Eaglescrag news, among which the principal item was that the old minister had died, and that there were hopes that Mr Morton might be appointed as his successor, and enclosing a letter which had arrived from James *Douglas* for Lionel himself, containing a most



"Lionel enjoyed reading Jem's letter very much."

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graphic account of his adventures in South America.

Lionel enjoyed reading Jem's letter very much. But there was one sentence at the end which somewhat surprised him. "Now, sir," Jem wrote, "I must tell you I met an uncle of Ned's in Rio. Richard Harding is his name. He came up from the interior to meet his nephew, but Ned's ship was away afore he came. Ned was set on seeing him, but he was forced to go when his captain ordered it. Richard Harding was asking me about you, and he would not believe but what you was the oldest son of the Colonel. So I told him about Mr Tom, but he seemed quite puzzled like, and made me tell him all I could about you, sir. I think he said he saw you when you was a child ; but he was in an awful hurry, and being an Englisher, he spoke so quick like, I couldn't make out all he said ; but he gave me a letter to Mr Tom, so maybe that'll explain it."

On first reading this letter, Lionel thought this incident sounded rather mysterious, and he had visions of writing a line to his brother to ask if he could explain it ; but in a little while the delights of examining his beautiful writing-desk,

peeping into his new books, and trying his skill on a little flageolet, which was among the most greatly prized of his treasures, drove the whole affair out of his mind, and he scarcely thought of it again until reminded of it by later circumstances.

About a week afterwards, and towards the close of the holidays, the weather improved very much, and became bright and clear ; and on one specially fine morning, Mr Clifford gave leave for the boys to spend the day in a ramble along the shore towards the cliffs. Being allowed to carry their luncheon with them, they were at liberty to remain so long as the sun was high, on condition of avoiding dangerous places, and keeping as far as possible out of the water.

Mr Clifford accompanied them for a short way, as they set out, along with Violet and Johnnie, who intensely enjoyed a race over the sands with Lionel and Hugh Fitzgerald ; and so great were Johnnie's lamentations when summoned to return, that his father at last consented to leave him, that he might be a companion to Hugh.

When left to themselves, the boys wandered about in great enjoyment over the sparkling sands, sometimes separately, sometimes one or

two together. Lionel and Henry Delamere had a hunt for shells, and went over the low rocks in search of them as far as they could venture to do, lest the tide should suddenly turn. When at last it did, more quickly than they expected, and they were forced to make a rush for the shore, springing from one rock to another, they met Townsend, Meredith, and Temple, dashing across the sands from another direction.

All reached the dry sand below the cliffs at the same moment, and Lionel concluded his run by leaping upon a ledge of rock, and defying the other boys to dislodge him.

The attempt to do so afforded them all great diversion for some minutes; and when at length, afraid of being vanquished by mere superiority of strength, Lionel ended the skirmish by jumping down, clearing Johnnie's head, as the little boy crouched on the ground, Townsend was induced to declare, that at that point he could quite well climb to the top of the cliff.

"You had better not," remarked Temple. "Beaumont did it one day; but there's an awkward step in the middle there, you'd be apt to get dizzy."

Townsend, however, professed himself to be

fully competent for the feat ; and Meredith and Lionel being eager to witness his exploit, he accordingly began the ascent.

All went well till he reached the step Temple had mentioned.

"Take it with your left foot, Townsend," Lionel called out, his quick eye perceiving at once, that from the lie of the ground above, this was the only safe course, "and catch hold of that projecting stone to the right."

But Townsend, affecting to despise the hint of a boy younger than himself, placed his right foot on the point of the rock, and by so doing, though he contrived to steady himself where he was, made it quite impossible for him to proceed, while the position he held equally precluded him from retracing his steps.

Greatly frightened now, the poor boy looked up and down imploringly, while his companions below, though sharing in his alarm, seemed, for the most part, incapable of rendering him any assistance. Lionel alone had sufficient presence of mind to see what was the only thing to be done."

"Hold fast, Gerald," he shouted ; "don't stir, I'll help you."

And before the others knew what he was after, he had sped along the sand to a still lower ridge of the cliffs, which he could easily scale ; and in less than two minutes he appeared on the height above the spot where Gerald, whose head was rapidly failing him, was with great difficulty supporting himself by clinging to the stone.

Lionel saw that if he could only have a hand to rest on for an instant, Gerald could turn himself upon the rock, so as to gain the next step higher up ; but the cliff above was very precipitous, and particularly difficult of descent, and the other boys looked aghast at Lionel as he prepared to attempt it.

The loose sand and crumbling stones were exceedingly slippery, and the great height above the sea might have turned the head of a less experienced climber ; but the Highland boy, accustomed from his early childhood to clamber up and down the heights around his home, felt tolerably confident of keeping his footing, and had no hesitation in endeavouring to accomplish his object.

Hastily throwing off his jacket, so as to leave his arms more free, Lionel cautiously slid over the upper edge of the rock ; and by clinging with

one hand to an overhanging clump of brushwood, which covered the face of the cliff, he contrived to lower himself gradually to a point where he could stand, and from whence he could stretch out the other hand to Townsend.

"Now, Gerald," he said, "don't pull, or we shall both be down ; just take a light hold of my hand, and turn so as to put your right foot up here."

Gerald was too much alarmed by this time to be above taking Lionel's advice, and being naturally very strong and active, he soon found the advantage of doing so. In five minutes more both boys were safe on the high ground, and were greeted with loud cheers from the party below, who had been watching their proceedings in no small trepidation.

"You've an awful deal of pluck, St Clair ; I'd have been in a fix but for you," were Townsend's somewhat blunt acknowledgments, as Lionel and he walked round to rejoin their companions.

Lionel laughed in reply, and said the rock was about the steepest he had ever tried ; but though his words and manner were light, there were deeper thoughts stirring beneath. He knew



“ ‘Now Gerald,’ he said, ‘don’t pull, or we shall both be down.’ ”

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much better than Gerald did the peril from which both had been mercifully preserved; and while gratitude for their safety was certainly not forgotten by him, perhaps stronger in his mind even than this, was the feeling of gladness at having thus been enabled to return good for evil, and to have done so in entire forgetfulness for the moment of the cause of offence between himself and his comrade.

Though no words on the subject passed between them on their homeward walk, none of the boys had intended mentioning to Mr Clifford what had taken place this afternoon; but little Johnnie, having run on before with Hugh Fitzgerald, and meeting his father in the village, lost no time in giving the latter a full account of the adventure, the chief actor in which was accordingly received by a mild remonstrance on thus uselessly putting himself into danger. To Lionel Mr Clifford said but little, but his smile of approval spoke more forcibly than words, and sent a thrill of hope and encouragement into the somewhat downcast spirit of his pupil.

And here the matter would have ended, but for a trifling circumstance, which led to more important results.

On the evening of the following day, after the rooms were shut up, and candles lighted, the little Cliffords were amusing themselves by telling stories to each other behind the window-curtains, while their parents talked together by the fireside.

Mr Clifford had been telling his wife of Townsend's escape, and of Lionel's share in it, and had remarked, as he did so, that he could hardly believe it possible that a boy, capable of such ready exertion and risk to himself on behalf of another, could willingly persist in deceit, even of the smallest kind.

Mrs Clifford replied that she felt quite convinced of Lionel's sincerity, and that all would yet be cleared up so as to prove it; and they were still discussing this topic, when their attention was attracted to some whispering between the children from their hiding-place.

"Tell papa, Johnnie," Violet was heard repeating, very earnestly, "never mind Hugh, tell papa."

Johnnie seemed to demur very strongly to this proposal, and then Violet rejoined, "Ask papa first to promise not to tell, and he won't, I know."

"Come out here, my darlings," said their

father, interposing, "and let me hear the secret ; I can keep a secret beautifully."

This assurance seemed to give Johnnie more courage, and after a renewed promise from Mr Clifford that his report was never to transpire, bit by bit the story was told, how the night before, when Hugh and Johnnie had gone to bed, Hugh had said how brave Lionel was ; and then Johnnie had asked why Lionel was afraid to speak the truth that Sunday when he was so brave on a week day ; and at last how Hugh had confided to Johnnie, in a great secret, that Lionel had nothing to do with the cards at all, that it was the others who were playing with them, except Delamere, and Lionel would not tell tales.

In considerable fear, Johnnie disclosed these particulars, and then looked up anxiously in his father's face ; but the tone of quiet cheerfulness in which Mr Clifford remarked in reply, that Johnnie was quite right to tell him, and that he was glad to find Lionel had spoken the truth, at once dispelled the child's misgivings, and long before his bed-time the occurrence had passed away from his young mind entirely.

All went on in the ordinary course for some time, except that there was perhaps a more sub-

dued tone of merriment among the boys generally than was quite natural, and Edwin Temple in particular was unusually silent and grave. The last Sunday of the vacation arrived, however, before anything further worthy of note had occurred. On that afternoon, Mr Clifford came into the schoolroom for a short time, to look over the boys' texts, as usual, before tea; and when all had been examined and commented upon, and the moment for moving seemed close at hand, they were somewhat startled by the words, "Wait a little, boys, I have a few words to say to you."

All were silent and still instantly, for they knew by Mr Clifford's manner that something serious was coming.

"Your holidays end to-morrow," he said, "and before your companions return, I wish to refer for a moment to the circumstance which took place a few Sundays ago. I mean my discovering that card and counter, and supposing they belonged to Lionel St Clair. I do so, because I have to explain that it has come to my knowledge that St Clair had nothing to do with it. I am not going to tell you in what way I received this information, it is sufficient for me to assure *you that it was not from any of yourselves*; and

I do not think even those whose consciences tell them they have not been open or upright in the matter, will be sorry now that I should know the truth. Being holiday-time, and considering all the circumstances, I do not intend on this occasion to take any further notice of the offence; though I hope, for your own sakes, you will not think lightly of the disobedience and untruth which it involved, as well as the mis-improvement of the Lord's-day. My dear boys, I do entreat you all in future, when trusted to your sense of honour, to remember that a more discerning Eye than mine is ever upon you, and that it is to Him who seeth in secret that you are responsible for perfect truth and integrity. I shall say no more. I hope I may never have cause to allude to this subject again."

A short pause ensued, and then Mr Clifford left the room. The boys dispersed in silence to their different rooms, and Lionel was slowly following Henry Delamere to his, when he felt his tutor's hand laid upon his shoulder—

"I am sorry I ever doubted you, Lionel," Mr Clifford said, "but, my boy, you were quite right not to clear yourself at the expense of others; your conduct has given me great pleasure."

Lionel looked up gratefully. To his susceptible temperament, the feelings of the moment, both of relief on his own account and concern on that of others, were too strong for him to venture to speak; but Mr Clifford well understood the language of his glowing face and earnest eyes, and did not look for further reply.

From that hour, there never arose a shade of misunderstanding between Lionel and his tutor; and during the many months and years of their future intercourse, even this apparently passing incident seemed to have contributed to cement and strengthen the deep interest with which Mr Clifford had from the first regarded the boy.

Among the rest of the pupils, nothing more was said openly upon the subject. Townsend and Meredith looked somewhat ashamed, but were evidently determined to give no expression to any such sentiment, and no one who knew them expected it; but late at night, when Henry Delamere was fast asleep, and Lionel, wakeful from excitement, was becoming desirous of following his example, Edwin Temple stole quietly into the room in the dark, and leaning over the bed, in a voice of deep feeling, entreated Lionel to forgive him the cowardly part he had acted towards him.

Lionel was much touched, and showed that he was so, warmly. He had always liked Edwin, and had been surprised at his being drawn in by Townsend and Meredith to join in their follies; but this simple display of right feeling completely obliterated from Lionel's mind all that was past, and though Delamere still continued to be his most chosen intimate, the two boys became fast friends, and remained so ever after.

Thus Lionel found, that even in the little world of school life, what seemed most hard to bear, might, if taken rightly, lead to good in the end. He could see this for himself even, in the increased esteem in which he was subsequently held by his companions, and in the confidence reposed in him by Mr and Mrs Clifford. But there was much which he did not see, and of which he could as yet be but dimly conscious: the many lessons learned in those few weeks—lessons of more strict conscientiousness, of self-command, of patience and forgiving gentleness—all these had been tending to raise and mould his character, and to form in him habits of deeper thought and of more earnest manliness, than he had hitherto attained to.

Thus the discipline through which, day by day,

in comparatively trifling matters, Lionel was now passing, proved to be an important part of the training by which he was being prepared for greater temptations and experiences, destined to come upon him at no very distant period.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT SHALL I BE ?

EIGHTEEN months had passed away since Lionel spent his first Christmas holidays at Seaview Lodge, and now once more over Scotland's Highland woods and glens, the summer sun was shining.

Brightly sparkled the line of silver light on the calm waters of the bay, as on a balmy evening in June, Miss St Clair occupied her favourite seat in the garden of her pretty cottage, and watched, as she was often wont to do, for the first sign of the daily-expected steamer.

In a life so quiet and retired as was the daily routine of the Woodbank *ménage*, even the sight of the vessel, evening after evening, steering its course in the distance, was a sort of event to look forward to ; but on this occasion there seemed to be some special interest attaching to its arrival.

The drawing-room window was open, and within might be seen preparations for a meal ; while, from time to time Eliza, now a grown-up waiting-maid, looking particularly neat and trim, would come out from the back door, and take a private survey of the sea view.

The lapse of time had touched but lightly of late years on Miss St Clair. Her brow was no less smooth, nor her smile less placid, than it had been two years previously ; and if there were a shade of anxiety visible in the longing glances she cast towards the opening between the islands where she knew the first signal would be discoverable, it was the anxiety of expectation, not of uneasiness.

But she was not altogether alone in her watch : reclining upon the grass beside her, in brown shooting-coat and straw-hat, was her nephew Thomas St Clair, looking stronger and more robust than when first he returned to his native shores, but in no other respect changed in appearance or manner.

As the clock inside the house struck seven, he moved as if to go : “ Well, I think I will leave you, Aunt Lily, to receive him ; you will like to *have him to yourself* the first night, and really I

feel too much ashamed of the whole affair to be able to greet him properly at first, poor fellow !”

“There is no need to be ashamed, my dear,” Miss St Clair replied ; “you have had no hand in it, and your father would not have felt it honourable to do otherwise.”

“No—so he says ; but to my mind the whole thing is wrong. I don’t think people have any right to decide so irrevocably what is to be done so long after they are gone themselves ; my father ought to have had it all in his own hands, to act as he judged best.”

“Well, it seems certainly as if it might have been better so ; but yet, we cannot say. I shall be glad when the time is over.”

“Yes, indeed ; it will be a great shock to him—I feel sure of that ; and I must watch young Harding and his uncle when they arrive. I don’t feel at all certain, even now, that Ned did not meddle with my pocket-book, and tell Eustace what he had seen there. The boy has never been the same since, and Lionel observed it, for he spoke to me about it last year when we were abroad.”

“But there was nothing in the book to give explanation, I thought ?” said Aunt Lily, inquiringly.

“No, nothing definite ; but Eustace may have had surmises—he is very knowing. However, I hope he and Lionel will be all right this time ; and we cannot avoid the rest. I must go now, but tell Lionel I shall be down to see him the first thing in the morning.”

And with a few more kindly words, Tom hastened away by the path over the hills to Eaglescrag.

For once, the steamer was very punctual to her time ; wind and tide were both in her favour, and the season of the year being still early, the full flow of tourists had not yet set in to detain her on her way.

It was not the usual custom for passengers to come ashore below Woodbank ; there was no regular landing-place, and in general the boats from the steamers went to the cove at Eaglescrag ; but this evening a little boat joined the steamer exactly opposite the cottage, and several passengers having entered it, Miss St Clair perceived that the rowers were making straight for the shore, where, the tide being high, they evidently intended to run the boat up on the beach.

“Oh, ma’am ! it must be Master Lionel himself,” exclaimed Eliza, who had emerged from

her hiding-place ; "please, will I go down and open the gate ?"

"Yes, by and by," replied her mistress, "they will take ten minutes to get to shore."

"There's a many more forbye Master Lionel there, ma'am," remarked Eliza, as she watched the boat coming nearer.

"People from the village, most likely," returned Miss St Clair ; "it is nearer for them than going to Eaglescrag."

"Well, ma'am, I can't say ; but if my eyes don't deceive me, one of them's Jem Douglas—at least, it's terribly like him."

"Jem Douglas ! oh, surely not, Eliza ; he was in the Southern Seas last time I heard of him. But see ! the boat is almost at the shore now. Go down and open the gate, and help Master Lionel to carry up his luggage."

A few minutes more, and a light step was heard on the gravel, and then Lionel himself appeared, bounding up the slope.

"Here I am at last, Aunt Lily !" he exclaimed. "I thought I was never to see you again ! but I have come now ! And so nice and jolly you look, too ! oh, it's famous to be here again !"

"So it is indeed, dear boy, to see you,"

CHAPTER IV

THE first thing that struck him when he entered the room was the silence. It was a silence that was not empty, but full of a sense of expectancy.

"What a beautiful room!" he said, looking around him with a smile.

He was standing in the center of the room, looking at the walls. The walls were covered with pictures and tapestries. Some of them were old and faded, but others were new and bright. He looked at them for a moment, then he turned and looked at the door. The door was open, and he saw a woman standing there. She was looking at him with a smile, and he saw that she was the same woman who had been with him before.

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about his own concerns, all misgivings on his account passed away from her mind; she saw he had come back as fresh and pure in spirit as he went away, and, whatever future cause of anxiety might arise, she felt that, so far, he had stood his trial well.

This was the first time Lionel had been in Scotland since his school career began. In the summer of the previous year, Colonel St Clair had been in very feeble health, and had gone abroad, taking his whole family with him. Lionel had joined them during his holidays, and had very much enjoyed the tour in Switzerland, and the companionship of Eustace and Emily, and had come home laden with sketches of Swiss scenery and specimens of flowers and stones for his collection ; but still his most ardent longings had ever been for Eaglescrag, and his joy was therefore unbounded, when he received a letter from Ada early in June, telling him that he was to spend the vacation in Scotland, not, however, at Eaglescrag itself, but at Woodbank. "Papa," Ada said, "was not very strong yet, and Tom and Julia, with little Arthur and two twin babes, would be with them. Papa hoped Lionel would not mind, as he would be such a little way off, he could see them every day."

It did seem rather curious to Lionel that he should be considered as the one too many ; but his was not a nature to dwell upon a point of this kind, and he was too happy in the thought of being among his old haunts, to bestow much attention upon it; so he wrote off at once to Ada, saying he minded nothing, if only he could be there, and since then, his dreams, both waking and sleeping, had been of the hills and dales of Eaglescrag, and of all the delights he expected to enjoy among them.

"Tell me about Tom and Julia, Auntie," he said at length, after his eagerness on some other domestic details had been in some degree satisfied ; "they have two more babies now, haven't they?"

"Yes ; two pretty little girls, Rosa and Blanche : they take up a great deal of room in the old Tower, they require so many attendants."

"Oh yes. And so I am to be here ; I don't mind a bit, you know, Aunt Lily, for I like of all things to be with you, only, I thought it sounded rum at first ; and then, papa told me so particularly to come straight here, instead of going to see them all first, as I expected. Wasn't it strange, Auntie ? Is papa not better ?"

"He is a good deal better, dear, but he is not

strong, and it is a comfort to him to have Tom in the house, he is such a help."

"Yes, indeed. I don't wonder at papa liking that, and, of course, it is Tom's right to be there before me. I suppose papa thought it best for me to be with you, and Julia too, perhaps."

And Lionel laughed, for he had not forgotten what he had fancied his sister-in-law's old grudge against him.

Miss St Clair smiled, and said he was a saucy boy, and she hoped Julia and he would be better friends now; and then she turned the conversation by asking how Lionel had left her old friends, Mr and Mrs Clifford.

This was a topic on which Lionel was quite ready to enter, and he accordingly launched forth into a long and most entertaining account of his life at Seaview, describing each of his school-fellows, as well as little Violet and Johnnie, most particularly, and expatiating in such glowing terms of the endless variety of amusement to be found in trap-ball, cricket, boating, and pic-nic excursions, that Miss St Clair soon perceived, that however true his deepest feelings might be to the associations of home, his capacity for happiness was not confined to Eaglescrag. The

boy's tone warmed, too, when he spoke of his tutor. Mr Clifford's fatherly kindness seemed to have sunk into his heart, and to have gained a real and abiding influence over him.

"And how about the studies, Leo?" Miss St Clair inquired, when the amusements and home-life had been fully discussed. "Do they progress as well as the cricket and climbing?"

"I hope so, Aunt Lily," Lionel answered, cheerfully; "pretty well, at least. It was awfully hard work at first, but Mr Clifford said I had done better this last six months, and I have tried for three prizes. We don't know yet who has gained them; we gave in our papers the night before we left."

"And what are the subjects? Anything within my comprehension?" said Aunt Lily.

"Oh yes, Auntie. You wouldn't make much of the Latin, I suppose, though you did give me my first Latin lesson; but the subject of the Latin theme was, the Comparative Merits of Greeks and Romans, as generals and philosophers. I don't expect I shall gain the prize for that, Townsend and Delamere will have the best chance; but I think I may perhaps succeed with the English essay—it is for the

Scripture prize—on the life and journeys of St Paul: and then the third is an English poem. I liked that; the subject was to be, Modern Improvements, and we might choose which, each for ourselves. I did not know at all what to choose at first. Temple took the volunteers; and one of the others took railway locomotion; and another, the electric cable; so I did not know what to do. But one day, at Easter, Mr Clifford took some of us on a trip to London, and a friend of his there showed us several of the Ragged Schools; so that I thought I would make the Ragged Schools the subject of my poem. And then, I was telling Jem—— O Aunt Lily, I forgot to tell you, Jem Douglas has come home! He arrived in the boat with me to-night!”

“Did he really? Then Eliza was right. She thought she saw him. And how is the famous Jem?”

“Capital and jolly; just as great a brick as ever, Jem is. He has grown as brown as he can be, but I knew him directly I stepped on the steamer. He said he had had a letter from Tom just before he left America. Another man was with him, Ned Harding’s uncle, and he wanted to come and speak to me, but Jem would not let

him—I don't know why ; he looked a respectable sort of a chap."

"Well, there seems to be nothing but arrivals to-night," said Aunt Lily, lightly ; "and in a day or two, I suppose we shall have Ada and Emily appearing. But you look tired, dear Lionel ; I must not let you sit up too late."

Lionel disclaimed all idea of fatigue, but some domestic interruption occurring at that moment, the conversation was broken off, and not resumed again connectedly that evening.

Next day, after Lionel had been to Eaglescrag, and explored every hole and corner into which he could make his way, gladdening little Arthur's heart by fun and frolic, and delighting the nurses by his pleased admiration and gentle handling of the tiny twins, till even Julia was charmed into satisfaction with him, he readily acceded to Tom's proposal of a ramble together up the glen.

From the time of his first arrival at home, Tom had always found Lionel's companionship peculiarly congenial to him. Not that the two characters were at all similar : Tom felt that if, in riper years, Lionel fulfilled his early promise, he would prove far his superior in point of talent

and strength of intellect, as well as in depth of mind and feeling ; but he did not like his society the less for that, and, perhaps, one great bond of union between them was in a kind of childlike simplicity which characterised both, and which gave a most pleasant freedom and ease to the confidential talks of their rare occasions of private intercourse.

Probably, however, more than all, the real secret of their drawing so much towards each other, especially on Lionel's side, was the consciousness of a higher aim in their mutual hopes and purposes than was generally manifested around them. In Lionel, indeed, such feelings were but dawning ; but he was quick of perception, and he had found, even in the very few words which had ever passed between them on the subject, that Tom understood him better than did any one else, except Aunt Lily.

Colonel St Clair himself was a man of much thought and reflection, and full of anxiety for the best interests of his family ; but, on the subject of religion, he was exceedingly reserved, and he had never sought directly to bias the minds of his children with regard to it, although his whole influence over them tended to good.

Miss St Clair had done what she could for them since their mother's death, and they all looked up to and revered her ; but still, not being one of the immediate family, and Ada's nature being very independent and not very teachable, it was not easy, except with Lionel, who had frequented Woodbank from his infancy, to do more than drop occasional hints.

Eustace and Emily were devoted to Ada, and cared little for the authority of any one else ; and Ada herself, perhaps, was capable of more serious thought than she ever allowed to appear. But she was young and gay, and full of bright hopes and anticipations ; and but too seldom did she pause to consider how vain, even if realised, must all such be, without blessings more enduring in addition.

Tom was very different. His temperament was as lively, and his spirit naturally as bold and independent, as his sister's ; but, happily for him, the experiences of his youth had been made the means of teaching him the lesson of how rightly to balance the present and the future. And now, having, as he hoped, been led into the way of rest and peace himself, it was a great joy to him to perceive, in one so gifted with genius and attrac-

tive qualities as was Lionel, so evident a desire to follow in the same path.

But this was the under-current. On the surface, all was merriment and light-heartedness, as the two brothers set forth on their walk.

The afternoon was very warm, and the heat of the sun oppressive in many places ; but in the glen there was shade and coolness, and, except for the singing of the birds, and the rippling of the water, perfect stillness and quiet.

Tom and Lionel walked leisurely up the shaded path talking and laughing, the latter descanting volubly upon his hopes and fears as to prizes, and such matters, listening to his brother's report of the Sunday class, and of the general aspect of things among the villagers and tenants ; and relating many escapades and adventures of school experience, which highly entertained his auditor. Suddenly he broke off with—"And now, Tom, you see the end of all this is, that I must decide what I am to be !"

"Yes, I suppose it must come to that," replied Tom, smiling ; "but you had better be a *man* in the first place—that is the most necessary requisite, though, very often, it is the one last thought of."

“ Oh, but then, if I wait for that before I make up my mind, I am afraid the man will have very little to live upon when I have found him! You know my fortune isn't ready-made like yours, Tom!”

“ Not exactly; but I meant a *man* in the highest sense of the word—a *whole* man, Leo, not so much in age as in spirit.” And as Tom said these last words, there was a half-melancholy cadence in his tone which surprised Lionel, and which had the effect of putting a stop to the conversation, till, at a turn of the walk, a mossy bank, close to the stream, and overshadowed by trees, offered a most inviting place of repose. A sparkling waterfall, also, was within sight, the dancing sprays of which glittered in the sunshine.

“ This is pleasant!” said Tom, as both threw themselves down upon the grass. “ I do believe I have hardly been here since the last time I came with you, Lionel.”

Lionel scarcely replied, he was pondering over the change in his brother's manner, and wondering if he had said anything that jarred upon him. Perhaps Tom guessed the course his reflections were taking, for in a few minutes he said, somewhat abruptly, “ Have you lost your voice yet,

Leo ? Eustace is as hoarse as a raven, he cannot sing at all now."

Lionel laughed. "How has he managed that so soon ? No, mine is still to hand ; but it gives out wonderful notes now and then, warnings, I suppose, of departure."

"Well, such as it is, sing me that little song Emily and you sang the first summer I came home."

"Oh, 'The River !' it was Aunt Lily taught us that, when Emmy was a little mite of a thing, she could hardly say the words. I have not sung it for an immense time, but I'll try, if you like.

"River ! river ! joyous and bright !
Sparkling in sunshine, dancing in light,
Springing so merrily, bounding so free,—
Oh that my life might be gladsome like thee !

"River ! river ! swift thou art going,
Swiftly, more swiftly, constantly flowing
To the wide haven where soon thou shalt be
Merged, little river, in the deep sea.

"River ! they tell me that every day
I also am hastening fast on my way,—
Am I too by unseen Wisdom led,
Like thy crystal drops to their ocean bed ?

"Say, in this trust can I fearless move
On to the depths of Eternity's love,

Calm in tranquillity, gushing like thee,
Bright little river! answer me.

"No voice replies, but the silver tone
Of rippling music says, 'Not alone!'
Fair child! thou art blest with a guide for ever,
To carry thee home like thy friend the river!"

The rich tones of Lionel's voice sounded sweet in the ear of his brother. "Thank you, old fellow," the latter said, when the song was concluded. "It is an innocent little ditty, certainly, but I am glad I have heard it once more; it will never sound the same in another voice."

"Wasn't it curious, Tom, that you should have asked me to sing it to-day, after what we were talking about? for, somehow, that song always makes me think of what I shall be."

"Does it? well, it is not an unnatural association—the river has its work to do, and you have yours."

"Ah, yes! but then the river *must* do its work, and I don't know what mine is to be yet; that makes a difference."

"Have you ever thought of what you would like to be?"

"Sometimes. Eustace says he means to be a lawyer, and so does Townsend. I daresay they'll

do, for they are both awfully sharp. Delamere wants to be a clergyman, if his uncle will let him, and Temple is going into the army. Papa does not want me to do that. I really cannot tell very well what would be best." Lionel hesitated a moment, and then he went on, "I know I must not be idle, Tom, and I may have to do something in a town after all; but I do think, now and then, that, if I ever were fit for it, I should like better to be a clergyman—a minister in the country—than anything else. I wouldn't say so to any one but you, brother, and perhaps I ought not. But to-day, when I met Mr Morton as I was coming to Eaglescrag, and he was busy going in and out of the cottages, I could not help thinking of it again, and hoping I might do the same some time. Mr Morton always seems so pleased with his work. And then there is Mr Clifford, too; nobody like him almost anywhere. I do think it is a fine thing to be a minister! Don't you, Tom?" Lionel added, as for a minute Tom made no reply, but sat with his eyes fixed upon the running water.

At last he spoke: "Yes, indeed, Lionel; yes, if only I had felt the same at your age! But no, I must not go back to that. I quite understand

your wish, however, and it is well, *very* well that you should feel so. But still, my boy, I am afraid I must advise you not to set your heart too vehemently upon carrying it out ; obstacles may arise which might make it not right, and you are very young, your mind may change. Remember the responsibilities of such an office are very serious."

Lionel looked grave : " Yes," he said, " perhaps I don't think enough of that. Then you would not advise me, Tom, to ask papa about it just now ? "

" I think not, you had better wait till you are seventeen at any rate ; you will judge more truly then, and you will not leave Mr Clifford's sooner, so that no time will be lost."

" Well, perhaps that will be best ; at any rate I will do as you say, Tom. I am very glad you do not think me wrong, though."

" Wrong in having such a wish ! Oh no, Leo, far from that. I only want you to leave it for the present, so far as the outer world is concerned. I say this earnestly, Lionel, because in those days of youth, which for you are just beginning, I was foolish and headstrong myself, and I have felt the consequences of my own self-will. If you will

trust the matter to better guidance than your own, you will see clearly in time whether it is right for you to follow such a course or not. There is no more noble vocation on earth ; but no one can tell all at once whether it is the vocation intended for him. I should like you to make the best use of all your opportunities just now, and then you will be ready for whatever may betide. And you may rely upon me to make it as easy for you as I can."

The kindness with which this was said greatly encouraged Lionel ; and after a few moments' thought he was just going to reply, when the sound of voices, and a rustling in the wooded bank above the spot where they were sitting, attracted their attention, and in another moment Jem Douglas, followed by another man, appeared, swinging himself down from branch to branch of the overhanging trees, till he alighted, along with his companion, just behind Mr St Clair.

"Hollo, Jem !" said the latter, springing up from his mossy couch, "this is one way of arriving from foreign parts ! Welcome back to Eagles-crag, though, all the same !"

"Beg pardon, sir," returned Jem, touching his glazed cap, and accepting with a frank smile the

friendly hand which was held out to him. "I didn't think of any one being here : I was bringing Richard Harding to see you, sir, and we came this way to get out of the sun. I hope it's no offence, sir?"

"All right, Jem," replied Tom, cheerfully, "we are always glad to see old friends," and then he was turning to extend his welcome to the elder man, when he perceived him to be standing a few steps off, with his eyes rivetted upon Lionel, and with a look of great satisfaction brightening his hardy, weather-beaten countenance.

An exclamation of "Well, if he isn't as like!" was cut short by Mr St Clair's expressions of pleasure at seeing him in Scotland at last, and of inquiry after his nephew, of whom no tidings had been received at Eaglescrag for several months.

"Many thanks to you, sir, for asking after Ned," Richard Harding answered. "He's a wild boy, and scarcely deserves it. I saw him at Buenos-Ayres seven months ago, and I would fain have got him on board the vessel that brought me home, but he was set on remaining longer ; and being one that must ever have his own way, I left him. I've heard tell of him

since then, though, and I'm hoping now to see him home in a month or so ; he was in an awful hurricane lately, going to the West Indies—as near lost as well could be—and maybe the fright has done him good. His mother had a letter from him to-day.”

A few more remarks were exchanged with regard to poor Ned's roving habits, after which Tom invited Richard Harding to accompany him down to the Tower, where they could with greater convenience discuss the business which had brought him thither.

Lionel felt both amused and interested at the sight of the stranger, of whom he had so often heard in the little cottage on the moor, and who, after so many voyages round the world, had spent great part of his life in foreign lands. But still, the society of his old acquaintance had far greater charms for him ; and accordingly, leaving their companions to pursue their way more slowly, Lionel, followed by Jem, sped down the glen at a very rapid pace, never stopping till they had passed through the shrubbery-walk, and, springing over several fences, had made their way down over the rocks into the Cove.

The tide was nearly full, and there was no

thing Lionel liked better than to watch it at the turn. So there, seated upon the corner of an old boat, with Jem lying on the sand at his side, he enjoyed himself to the utmost ; making the sailor relate all manner of stories about his life at sea, and imparting a great variety of home information in return.

One thing, however, was rather remarkable. Open and communicative as he was in general, and though he had himself brought him to the Tower, Jem evidently avoided speaking much of Richard Harding ; and when Lionel laughingly referred to what Jem himself had said in his letter, he offered no explanation ; said Richard had never told him why he had made the mistake about Lionel, but that he supposed from having been so long abroad, he had forgotten about Mr Tom.

The manner of the reply struck Lionel as being somewhat peculiar, and he felt puzzled. He hoped, however, that the interview between his brother and the stranger might throw some light upon this delusion of the latter ; and keeping this thought in his own mind, he dropped the subject, and resumed his merry talk upon other matters.

The horizon was brightening, and the dew

beginning to fall, when, an hour or two later, Lionel came into the house to say good-bye before returning to Woodbank. His sister-in-law met him in the hall. "Why, Lionel," she said, "where have Tom and you been all this time? I was expecting a game at bowls this afternoon, and I have been all alone."

"Oh, have you, Julia? I am so sorry," Lionel replied. "I have not seen Tom for a long time; he went into the house to speak to a man, and I have been down in the Cove."

Julia was mollified by Lionel's gentle courtesy; and (after ascertaining, by examination of the hat-stand, that her husband must be still in the house), she invited him to come up into the nursery, and see the little ones, to the great glee of Arthur, who, directly he saw him, insisted on being carried down-stairs on Lionel's back, to say good-night to his papa.

The journey down the winding staircase was safely accomplished, Julia, however, keeping very close guard behind; and when they reached the hall, having knocked at the study door, she opened it without waiting for an answer, and told Lionel to go in.

Richard Harding was still there, and at the

moment of Lionel's entrance, he and Mr St Clair were bending their heads over some papers, and Lionel overheard his brother say, "There can be no question of it, the writing is identical in every particular; that will make it much easier for us."

Then Tom turned round and smiled when he saw his little son's merry face looking over Lionel's shoulder.

"You there, you rogue! take him to the window for one minute, Leo; our business is just finished. I have been neglecting you shamefully, Lionel."

A few more murmuring words passed over the papers, and Tom made Richard Harding sign one of them; and then he called Julia to him, and asked her to do the same. Lionel watched their proceedings with an unusual feeling of uneasy curiosity, but he said nothing; and when Richard Harding had taken his hat and departed, Tom was so gay and good-humoured and kind, and yet so silent on the subject of this interview, that the boy, with a timidity for which he could not account, was unable to muster courage to make any inquiry as to what had passed.

Still he could not altogether forget it. There

was no apparent reason for supposing that he himself had any personal interest in this man's conversation with his brother. The same kind of thing had happened on former occasions, without its suggesting any such idea; but yet, do what he would, Lionel felt himself possessed by the fancy that Richard Harding's visit was in some way connected with family affairs, in which he might be specially involved; and on this he pondered so deeply during his walk homewards, that Miss St Clair observed the change in his manner, and wondered what had produced it.

When in the course of the evening he discovered that his aunt was concerned at his silence, Lionel tried to throw off his abstraction, and to amuse her by an account of his afternoon's enjoyment; he described Richard Harding, and mentioned how long he had been at Eaglescrag; and perhaps, although from some undefined feeling he shrunk from giving any expression to his vague misgivings, he secretly hoped Aunt Lily might, of her own accord, say something to set him at ease.

She did not do so, however, and if she had any perception of the thoughts which were troubling her nephew's mind, she only showed it by an

additional tenderness of manner ; and when at last he had gone to bed, and Miss St Clair was left alone, she sat for a long time looking out on the starlit sky in a deep reverie, from which she was only roused by the clock striking twelve.

On hearing that sound she arose, and, lighting her candle, said to herself, almost aloud, " It is very near now ; I will not add to his difficulty ; the shadows beforehand may help to soften the reality."

CHAPTER X.

THE PIC-NIC.

"THERE they come, papa!—I see them!—they are just turning out of the lane, they will be here directly!" and Emily St Clair, now grown a tall girl of nearly twelve years old, with long auburn hair floating round her head, ran up to her father as he sat in his old accustomed place on the terrace, with Ada, as fresh and bright as ever, beside him.

"How often have you told us that already, Emmy?" said Eustace, who was climbing about on the rocks behind the parapet, and stretched over to catch hold of his sister's hair.

"Ah, you don't believe me, sir!" she replied, merrily, "but you will see for yourself in another minute! Let go my hair!—there now!" and almost before the words were said there was a sound of wheels, and a little pony-carriage appeared, in

which Miss St Clair was seated, with Lionel driving her ; and in the little back seat was a tall slight youth, whom our readers will recognise as Henry Delamere.

Eustace ran to welcome his aunt, and help her out, while Lionel, throwing down the reins and whip, hastened to introduce his friend to his father and Ada, and to receive their special greetings to himself ; for though it was not their first meeting, Colonel St Clair having arrived a few days previously, this was Lionel's birthday, and all were ready with congratulations in honour of it.

"I must thank you for your present, papa, first," Lionel said, eagerly, touching a gold chain which he wore, and drawing out the watch which was attached to it. "It is so beautiful, I could scarcely believe it was meant for me."

"You have deserved it, my boy," said Colonel St Clair, with Lionel's hand in both of his. "You know I promised you a reward, and you have more than earned it."

"Lionel will be quite overpowered, I think, with his accumulation of honours," said Aunt Lily, as she came smilingly towards them ; "Henry Delamere brought him good news last night."

Lionel's sparkling eyes and smiles of pleasure

betrayed his satisfaction, and at once enlightened Colonel St Clair. "Ah," he said, "I can guess what that is—prizes?"

"Yes, papa; I had a letter from Mr Clifford, and Henry told me besides. All the papers came back from the gentlemen who were to be judges, and I am to have the first prize for the English poem, and the second for the Latin theme, and the first for the Bible essay. I never expected to gain any for the Latin; Delamere has got the first."

"Hurrah!" said Eustace, throwing his cap into the air, "that's something like! I can't quite match that, Leo!"

"Ah, but you had so many more to try against—it is quite different," said Lionel, half regretfully, as he thought of the far wider field of competition which was open to Eustace, and which had been the object of his own ambition. The feeling, however, was but momentary, and the joy of success, added to, perhaps, by the shining face of his pretty watch, soon obliterated it.

"Never mind, Lionel, you have done as well every bit, and the boat is quite ready!" exclaimed Emily, clinging round him, and offering what she considered the best possible consolation. "It is to

be launched as soon as Aunt Lily is rested, and then we are to set off. Tom and Julia are down in the Cove putting the scarlet cloth into it; and, Lionel, you are to name it. Oh! there they are," she added, as Jem appeared helping his wife up the steps.

Colonel St Clair then proposed adjourning to the house for a few minutes, before starting on the pic-nic excursion, which was the intended amusement of the day. The last two years seemed to have told a good deal upon him in point of vigour and activity; and though he still was able to take part in the general proceedings, and had not lost interest in all that was going on, his strength was visibly declining from year to year, and the increasing delicacy of his complexion showed too plainly how fragile was the tenure by which health was continued to him.

His manner too, to all his children, was marked by even more than ordinary gentleness, especially towards Lionel, who had himself observed it, and had remarked to Ada, on their arrival at Eagles-crag, that he did not think papa was looking nearly so well as he did when they were abroad together last year.

But Ada, who was her father's constant companion, could not, or would not acknowledge this,

and Lionel tried in consequence to persuade himself that it had been only a fancy of his own.

A great change also had taken place in Eustace, as to appearance and manner. He had not grown so much as Lionel had, but he was much broader and stronger in figure, and his face had acquired more of the look of change peculiar to boys of that age ; so that at present, he might have been thought to be older instead of younger than Lionel.

School, however, had improved Eustace in many ways. He was still peculiar in disposition, and disposed to keep his plans and purposes to himself ; but having been thrown among so many companions, he had found his level, and had learned to estimate his own powers more justly ; while at the same time, the intercourse had tended to soften his natural arrogance of temper, and to make him more agreeable as a son and brother.

The separation too, between him and Lionel, seemed to have increased the boys' interest in each other ; and though in reality there still remained much that was uncongenial in their respective natures and tastes, yet their mutual affection was great notwithstanding, and this reunion amid their old haunts, a source of the

greatest pleasure to both. Henry Delamere's presence might be some restraint on Eustace; but Colonel St Clair had judged it best that, if possible, Lionel should have a companion at Woodbank; and Henry being without a home to go to, had felt the invitation an act of kindness for which he could not be too grateful.

And now all thoughts were turned to the arrangements for the pic-nic. The day was beautifully bright and calm, and everything promised well. The place of meeting fixed upon was a retired spot, a good way up the coast, near a mill; and as there was a considerable stream close by, falling into the sea at that point, and woodland scenery around, there seemed to be scope for any kind of amusement that might be preferred—fishing, flower-hunting; or hide-and-seek, as the moment might suggest.

Miss St Clair, however, was not partial to going on the water, much as she enjoyed looking at it. It was therefore arranged that Colonel St Clair should drive her to the place by the road in the pony-carriage, while the others took the longer way in the boat.

Little Arthur became exceedingly desirous of accompanying his grandpapa and his favourite

"Aunt Dilly," as he always called her, in the pony-carriage; and so great a pet was he with both of them, that they would have agreed to take him, had not Tom interposed and decided that he would be very much in their way, and that if he went at all, it must be in the boat, but that a little urchin like him would be better at home.

Emily, however, pleaded hard for him, and as Julia herself declared she would not go without him, Tom was forced to give way. "Very well, my dear," he said, "he can go, only if he comes to grief, don't blame me; see if you don't think differently before the day is over."

Julia declared herself to be quite willing to run the risk of such a catastrophe, and this point being settled, the ceremony of the launching of the boat took place with great success, Lionel naming it, amid many cheers, "The Violet," a designation which seem to afford much amusement to Henry Delamere, though he good-naturedly forebore from manifesting it, farther than by knowing smiles in his schoolfellow's direction.

The boat with its passengers set off on its first real voyage. Jem Douglas was there in holiday

trim, acting as one of the rowers, with his little brother Colin curled up at his feet, grinning with delight at the permission good-naturedly given by Mr St Clair for him to share in the expedition, and to be ready for any messages that might be wanted. As it turned out, Colin was by no means useless that day ; and certainly, so far as enjoyment was concerned, the treat was well bestowed.

Smoothly glided on The Violet, her bright flag, manufactured by Ada's swift fingers, waving in the breeze :—

“ Away ! away !
With streamers gay !
My bark glides o'er the sea ;
The gentle gale
That fills her sail,
Wafts her right merrily ! ”

So sung Lionel in his bird-like voice ; and the musical impulse being given, it was followed up by several glees between Ada and Julia, Tom and Lionel, the echo of which was borne across the water by the wind, and had the effect of attracting a passer-by to come down to the shore to listen to the sweet sounds.

An exclamation of “ There's Mr Morton ! ”

ensued from Eustace and Emily ; and on perceiving the young clergyman standing on the bank and waving his hat to them, Tom made a sign to him to meet them a little further on, where some low rocks jutted out into the sea, and where they could bring the boat near enough for him to get in and join them.

Mr Morton seemed very ready to accept the offer, and the desired point having been reached, he sprang into the boat from a distance, and with a lightness which greatly excited the admiration of the boys.

There was something very pleasing in the young man's appearance. Natural shyness and early rustic training made him a little diffident on first acquaintance ; but he was so simple and unaffected that this soon wore off, and the amount of cultivated thought and earnest feeling that lay beneath, seldom failed to render him an interesting companion to all who had any sympathy with the aim and work of his life.

Ada made room for him beside her with evident satisfaction ; and though Julia's bow of recognition had in it rather too much of condescension, little Arthur had no such ideas, and made his way to Mr Morton's knee with great alacrity,

the latter's first interest, however, at this moment being centred in Lionel and Jem Douglas, neither of whom had he seen since their return till now.

Tom put all at ease; without the slightest appearance of effort, he had a peculiarly happy way, on an occasion of this kind, of drawing the whole party together, and of making the intercourse lively and general; and thus, between friendly talk and merry jokes, every one felt that the way had been only too short, when the meeting-place appeared in sight.

"Hollo! they have got first!" exclaimed Eustace, as he jumped on shore, and saw his father standing by the pony-carriage. "Have you been long here, papa?" he added, as he ran up to him.

"No, only a few minutes; waiting for some of my grooms to come and relieve me of Donald," replied Colonel St Clair.

Eustace, however, did not take the hint implied, and it was Lionel who ran forward, and taking the reins into his own hand, led the pony away to a little shed near a quarry, used by some workmen, where the carriage was to be sheltered during their stay.

"I suppose I may turn Donald loose, Tom," Lionel called out, as he undid the traces.

"Oh, yes; he is safe enough not to wander far, and Colin will watch him. Wait, Leo, the carriage is too heavy for you alone;" and Tom came to lend a helping hand in pushing the little vehicle under the shed, only casting a look of surprise upon Eustace, as if enquiring why he had not offered to do so himself. Eustace, however, took no notice, and turned away to busy himself with searching for a suitable spot for the luncheon, which, with so many hungry children, was the first thing to be thought of.

One or two of Emily's friends—the little girls of Dr Wilson, the village medical man—had joined her at the place of rendezvous, and they, with the assistance of Lionel, Eustace, and Henry Delamere, made themselves very useful in unpacking and arranging the materials for the repast. Jem, being an adept at such kind of work, superintended them, and in a wonderfully short space of time, all was prepared beneath the shade of a plane-tree near the brook.

Several hours passed happily away; no adverse clouds appeared to interrupt the festivities of the day; the elders of the party enjoyed the calm

and stillness of so retired a spot as much as the children did the liberty and freedom, and found quite sufficient amusement in wandering about, and watching the sports of the young ones as they scampered to and fro.

Little Arthur, too, had his own share of enjoyment ; he trotted about for some time, first after Emily and the little girls, and then after Colin, and at last, being overpowered by the heat, had fallen asleep on his Aunt Ada's knee ; he woke up presently, refreshed and rested, but not in quite so placid a humour as before, and much disposed to look out for opportunities of mischief.

Thus it came to pass, that the first mishap of the day was caused by an attempt of Lionel's to persuade him not to creep into the shed behind the little carriage. Arthur, having often been told the same thing by his father, would soon have yielded to Lionel's coaxing words, had he been left to him, but Julia, overhearing what was going on, came to the rescue, which was the signal for Arthur to make a great resistance and uproar.

"Now, really, Lionel," she said, impatiently, "why do you tease Arthur so? I do wish you

not oppose the child in everything he

But, Julia," Lionel urged, "it is not safe for : if he goes in there, he is not seen, and if carriage were moved, he might be knocked

No one is going to move the carriage just w," Julia replied ; "you had better go back to boys, Lionel. I will manage Arthur myself."

Lionel had no alternative but to acquiesce ; several times afterwards he saw Arthur in the same dangerous corner, but having been once silenced, he did not like to interfere again, and Tom, having gone up the stream with his fishing-rod and Mr Morton, was not at hand to enforce the little fellow's obedience.

The hour for starting arrived, and Colonel St Clair was walking about to try to collect his scattered forces. Julia, having seen Arthur quite happy at play with the other children, had strolled up the bank of the stream with Ada to summon Tom and Mr Morton ; and Jem, Colin, and Donald were also found to be missing, the former having gone down to the boat, and the pony and its guide having wandered away over the common.

trim, acting as one of the rowers, with his little brother Colin curled up at his feet, grinning with delight at the permission good-naturedly given by Mr St Clair for him to share in the expedition, and to be ready for any messages that might be wanted. As it turned out, Colin was by no means useless that day ; and certainly, so far as enjoyment was concerned, the treat was well bestowed.

Smoothly glided on The Violet, her bright flag, manufactured by Ada's swift fingers, waving in the breeze :—

“ Away ! away !
With streamers gay !
My bark glides o'er the sea ;
The gentle gale
That fills her sail,
Wafts her right merrily ! ”

So sung Lionel in his bird-like voice ; and the musical impulse being given, it was followed up by several glees between Ada and Julia, Tom and Lionel, the echo of which was borne across the water by the wind, and had the effect of attracting a number by to come down to the shore to listen to the sweet sounds.

Attention of “ There's Mr M ”

running down from the glen, and took his little boy into his own arms.

Julia followed, in a state of the greatest excitement.

"What is it? Oh, my darling Arthur! Lionel, what have you done to him? Is it not enough for you to stand in his way at every turn, but you must treat him in this manner!"

Lionel's colour rose at this injustice, especially as Mr Morton was standing by, looking greatly surprised at such an outburst, but he wisely did not speak, and Emily was beginning to explain that it was not Lionel's fault at all, Arthur would go in, when Tom himself once more interposed. "Gently, gently, Julia," he said, "you don't know what you are saying. The child is not seriously hurt; it is merely a few scratches, and Lionel had nothing to do with it—it was his own fault for being disobedient. Hush, now; hush, Arthur, boy. Aunt Lily will be frightened if you cry so; we'll soon make the face well again. See, Colin, you run as fast as your feet will carry you up to Dr Wilson's house, and ask him to come down here for a minute—I saw him going home a little while ago; and you, boys, get the pony in as quickly as you can."

Colin sped off like a young roe, and sooner than could have been supposed, was back again with Dr Wilson. By this time Arthur's wounded feelings had been somewhat appeased by sugar-plums from Aunt Lily's reticule, and the doctor having pronounced that his hurts were of no great consequence, only requiring a little care for a day or two, but that to avoid the air on the water, he must be taken home in the carriage, he was yet further consoled by the prospect of a drive with grandpapa. The equanimity of the whole party would now have been very nearly restored had it not been for Julia's hasty words, which, causeless as he had felt them, had fallen like a blight upon Lionel's day of pleasure.

The speaker of them, in the meanwhile, was concerning herself very little about their effect. Full of anxiety for her boy, she chose to return home in the little back seat of the pony carriage, and, not wishing to cloud the merriment of the others, Lionel exerted himself while in the boat to talk and laugh as usual ; but Tom, who was fearful he might be vexed at the undeserved reproach cast upon him, saw that his brightness was dulled, and that the arrival at home and the *breaking up* of the party were a relief to him.

Colonel St Clair not having been on the spot at the time of the accident, had seen nothing of what passed. He blamed Eustace for not taking the trouble to listen to Lionel's warning ; but as the real fault, if there were any, lay with Julia herself, he said no more ; and Arthur being found, on his father's arrival, very peacefully asleep, and, except for the diminution of beauty, looking much the same as usual, all serious concern about him was at an end ; and Tom spent the evening in trying to make his wife confess that the events of the day had fully verified the instincts of his paternal sagacity in the morning.

Lionel was quieter than usual, and rose with alacrity when his aunt proposed taking leave. Julia and Ada went with her to get ready, Emily had gone to bed, Eustace carried Henry Delamere off to romp in the hall, and Colonel St Clair was half-asleep by the fire, which he always required in the evening after a day of fatigue. Tom and Lionel were thus left alone, standing by the window.

"Tired, Leo?" said the former. "Has it been an auspicious birthday?"

"Oh, yes, Tom, I hope so," he replied. "I am sure it ought, you have all been so kind ; but—I

was sorry about Arthur, and Tom, I did wish Julia had not spoken so to me—and before Mr Morton, too. I am sure I wouldn't come in Arthur's way for anything. I did not know what she meant."

"Oh, she meant nonsense," said Tom, putting his hand kindly on Lionel's shoulder. "Never mind her; she was only frightened about her duckling. She knows you well enough, really, Leo; and as for Morton, he will never think of it again, so don't you either."

Tom's genial words soothed and cheered Lionel for the present; and as Julia, when he took leave of her, looked more pleasantly at him, and said, "Good-night, Lionel; I suppose I had better have let you manage Arthur after all," the impression gradually wore off, so far at least as appeared outwardly.

The subject, however, was revived in some measure by Henry Delamere, who, when Lionel and he had retired for the night at Woodbank, and were indulging in a little talk before going to bed, suddenly remarked, in his tone of quiet drollery, "That sister-in-law of yours is rather an alarming person, St Clair. I almost thought *she* was going to eat you this afternoon!"

Lionel laughed. "She is a funny creature. I don't know what came over her to-day. Sometimes she is as benign as can be."

"Is she? Well, I daresay I shall like her too when I know her better; she *looks* very nice. But I hope I shall never have the misfortune to offend, for it strikes me she could be tolerably implacable."

Lionel was highly amused at his friend's criticisms, though he had too much good taste to give any opinion as to their justice; and the conversation now turning to their own more personal interests, the few minutes they had been allowed passed very quickly away.

Not entirely so the feelings excited in Lionel's mind by the occurrences of this day. For several nights afterwards there recurred to him, ere he fell asleep, dim memories of his childhood—words and looks which had then attracted his attention, but which he never could recall distinctly in his more wakeful hours; and, notwithstanding the many objects of interest which occupied his thoughts day after day, there sprung up within him, in those midnight hours, an impression of some crisis being at hand different from anything he had before experienced.

He said nothing of all this to any one. Indeed, he could hardly have defined the feeling to himself ; and his aunt seeing him ever full of merriment and animation—roaming about in company with Eustace and Henry Delamere every fine day with his fishing-rod or sketch-book ; or, when the weather was wet and stormy, painting, or studying, or holding long discussions with his friend, the boyish wisdom of which it greatly entertained Miss St Clair to listen to—felt quite at ease about him, and watched the almost daily development of his character with the greatest interest and pleasure.

Sunday came round—a beautiful, glowing July Sunday, the last of the month. Miss St Clair was unable to go to church that morning ; but as Lionel and Henry Delamere walked thither by a pretty field-path, scarcely a sound was to be heard but the chirping of the grasshopper under the hedges, the soft warbling of birds, and the tinkling of the church bell in the distance.

All the family met in the little country church, with the exception of Miss St Clair ; and it was Mr Morton who conducted the service and preached. Like most other boys, Lionel was but apt to give a very divided attention to what

he heard in church; but on this Sunday, his aunt having told him he must remember the sermon for her, he resolutely gave his mind to follow it all through, and was surprised to find when it was concluded how much he could remember.

The interval between the morning and afternoon services being very short, they did not return home at that hour, but strolled about together in a picturesque field, shaded on one side by a row of elms, beneath which there were many stumps of fallen trees, on which they could rest on days like this, and enjoy the sweet summer air, which was refreshing after the heat of the church.

Tom and Lionel wandered away from the rest of the party to a quiet corner, where they found a shady seat. Lionel had received his prizes the day before, and was describing them to his brother, who promised to come to Woodbank next day to see them.

"But, Leo, I want you before that," added Tom; "you must come over to Eaglescrag this evening and inspect my class. You were the originator of it, you know, and I should like you to see it, and take some of the little fellows in hand. I will walk home with you if it is late."

"Oh, I will come, certainly," said Lionel, looking much pleased, though rather grave. "Thank you for asking me, Tom: it is just what I wanted to do; but Tom, please, I had rather not teach—I really couldn't." He paused for an instant, and then in so low a tone that Tom could but just catch the words, he added, "I have much more need to be taught myself."

"We may all say that, my boy, with truth," Tom replied; "but I will not press you. I shall be very glad to have you present, at any rate. I don't think I shall be much afraid of you as a listener."

There was silence after that for about ten minutes, during which Lionel's thoughts were evidently busy at work. At last Tom said, "Did you like Mr Morton's sermon to-day, Lionel? You have not heard him for a long time."

"Yes I did, very much. He does not seem nearly so nervous as he used to be. I think it was an easy sermon to attend to, and I liked the text. Those words sound so grand—the just for the unjust; and yet, Tom, I don't think I do understand the sermon—not quite: not for myself mean."

"Yes, I know," replied Tom; "but wait till you

have heard the end of it in the afternoon : that will help you, Leo, I think."

Lionel was pleased to meet with such ready comprehension of his thoughts without obliging him to express them further in words. He did not reply, but his look of grateful affection told Tom that they understood each other ; and as just then Emily came running towards them with sandwiches and biscuits for luncheon, telling them they must be quick, or it would be time to go into church again, the *tête-à-tête* was interrupted for the present.

Lionel and his friend returned to Woodbank immediately after the afternoon service, which was very short ; and when, after dinner, they all gathered round the open window in the little drawing-room, Aunt Lily claimed the fulfilment of her nephew's promise to give her some account of the sermons.

Lionel tried to do so. He had a remarkably retentive memory, and a flow of words at command, and, in general, he was very clear and accurate in his recollections of anything upon which he had fixed his attention ; but somehow, on this particular occasion, after he had told his aunt the text, 1 Peter iii. 18, and the leading

divisions of the sermon, his powers of expressing himself seemed to come to an end. He remembered many things Mr Morton had said, remembered them more vividly, he thought, than he had almost ever remembered a sermon before, but still he could not bring himself to repeat them; and Miss St Clair, perceiving his unusual embarrassment, appealed to Henry Delamere to add the benefit of his memory to Lionel's.

Henry, though taken by surprise, was very willing to comply with the request, and, with a simplicity and seriousness which it rejoiced Miss St Clair to observe, he recapitulated the substance of the two sermons of which Lionel had given the outline.

Upon the latter, the manner in which his friend repeated it made more impression than even the sermon itself had done. No one who heard his tone of unconscious earnestness could doubt that Henry not only possessed a clear understanding of the subject of the sermon, but that he had felt the reality of its teaching in his own experience; and the sudden perception of this, which flashed on Lionel as he listened to him, seemed in a moment to bring the truth home to himself, as personal, in a way he had never felt before, and of

which, as he had told Tom in the morning, he had often felt the want.

Pondering over the whole matter, he took his way over the hill to Eaglescrag in the evening; and though the appearance of Eustace and Emily, who came rushing up the glen to meet him, drove away his reflections for a time, the class itself only tended to revive and rivet them in his mind.

From ten the number of Mr St Clair's scholars had increased to thirty, about twenty of whom were as old as Lionel himself, some of them older: the others were little boys, from eight to eleven or twelve years old; and these last Ada took charge of in a separate room, for the first part of the time, bringing them back to hear her brother's closing address, and to join in singing the parting hymn.

Jem Douglas was among them, looking deeply interested in all that went on; though, being only a visitor, he took no part in the proceedings.

Lionel surveyed the lads with great satisfaction and pride. He knew most of them by sight, as the companions of his earliest days of boating and wading in the water after sea-weed and shell-fish; and though he and they had parted com-


pany now, and entered upon different courses. he still retained his old fondness for them, and greeted each one cordially.

All were outwardly quiet and attentive, some of course much more so than others. The answers now and then made Lionel inclined to smile; but when the sermons were again alluded to, he was surprised to hear how much some of the boys had remembered. Altogether, the whole scene pleased and gratified him even more than he had expected; and when, ere the class was dismissed, he added the sweet tones of his voice to their somewhat rough and untutored strains in the words,

“Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee,”

he felt as he did so a thrill of gladness in the thought of the bond of union that, under any circumstances, might then, and always, exist between him and his humble friends in the Highland glen.

What might seem to be merely the insignificant events of a passing day, in this case were fraught with important and lasting results. Though Lionel hardly realised it at the time, and much as he had, from the beginning of their acquaintance, admired and esteemed the undoubtedly



beautiful character of Henry Delamere, the better knowledge which he gained that afternoon, of the foundation upon which his friend's attractions rested, gave an impulse to his inner life most powerful in its effects. He had meant well before, and had striven bravely, but it was rather in the dark ; and from this time his ideas and desires became less vague and dreamy—he began to see whence arose the spring of Henry's gentle temper, patience, cheerfulness, and contentment in his orphan life ; and ever and again when, in after years, Lionel was tempted at times to indulge in impatience and murmuring against his earthly lot, or to yield to the power of evil, would there rise up in his memory the words of the text of that summer Sabbath, "The just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God."

CHAPTER XL

SEPTEMBER STORMS.

LOUDLY howled the wind on the evening of the 20th of September. The early part of the day had been fine, but clouds had gathered at the hour of sunset, and were rolling heavily across the darkened sky ; and as the back-door of Eagles-crag Tower opened, and Mr St Clair and James Douglas appeared on the threshold talking earnestly, the current of air rushed along the passage into the house, and whistled through the old chimneys and turret-windows.

"A storm getting up, Jem," said Mr St Clair, "that wind sounds like long ago. Come in good time, perhaps, for your decision?"

Jem smiled. "Perhaps, sir. I'll think it over, and tell my father, and then let you know."

"Yes, do," returned Mr St Clair ; "but think twice, Jem, before you refuse. Such an offer does

not come every day, and my father will not give you another chance ; and, with the prospect before you, I should think you would like it."

"Small doubt of that, sir, if I can get over the hankering after the high seas ; but good night, sir, I'll give it my best thoughts. Don't stand there in the cold, Mr Tom," Jem added, as Mr St Clair opened the door wider, to give him the benefit of the light in crossing the yard, "I'll find my way bravely."

"Take the upper path, Jem ; don't go by the shore to-night," Mr St Clair called out after him ; but the wind was too high, and the sailor too far off to hear ; and, when Jem had passed through the plantation, he turned down by the rocks to the beach.

The storm had so lately risen, that the sea was not yet very much disturbed ; but, as Jem hastened along, the strength of the wind increased every moment, while the sky grew blacker, and the roar of the distant waves portended a severe equinoctial gale.

Jem, however, having travelled so far, and encountered many a tropical tempest, thought but lightly of these signs at first, and, notwithstanding the rain which began to pour heavily, and to

beat against him from all directions, he pursued his way resolutely, till he had almost reached the foot of the steps leading up to his father's house.

The tide was coming in quickly, and but little light remained to distinguish between the water and the low shelving rocks which, at that point, lay about the sand ; and while Jem, knowing the irregular character of the ground, was carefully choosing his steps, he suddenly perceived, just visible in the darkness, the figure of a man standing on one of the rocks farthest from the shore, with a sea-glass raised to his eye.

"Hollo ! my friend," he shouted ; "you won't see much there !"

"No," replied the deep voice of Richard Harding ; "but if I'm not mistaken, there is a craft of some kind out beyond the point. I've lost sight of her now ; but if she's much longer, she'll have hard work to get in to-night. There ! Jem ; there she is again ! Don't you see ?"

As Jem strained his eyes in the direction pointed out, he did fancy he could descry the dim outline of a mast, but that was all ; and in a few moments even that has quite undiscernible.

A sudden gust of wind, too, nearly carried Richard Harding off his feet, and even forced Jem

to spring back to the firmer ground, lest he should lose his footing on the slippery rock.

"You'd best come up home with me, Richard," he said; "father'll be glad to see you, and you'll never get across the moor to-night: it'll be pitch dark in ten minutes."

"That it will, and an ugly night too," replied Richard Harding; "but I wouldn't wish to be a trouble."

"No fear of that," returned Jem; and the immediate prospect of a bright fire and a kindly welcome proving too pleasant to be resisted, Richard soon acceded to the proposal; and, preceded by Jem, who, going before, in some measure warded off the bursts of wind which rushed down the ravine, he mounted the steps, and reached the cottage door in safety.

John Douglas and his wife possessed in a rare degree the too uncommon virtue of genuine hospitality; enjoying but a small proportion of this world's comforts for their own use, they yet were ever ready to share what they had with others who had less, or with whom their lot for the time might be cast, and they could not be said even to miss what they thus so freely gave. Rather was the benefit they bestowed more than returned

to them, in the universal respect and affection with which they were regarded in the little community.

Richard Harding, having heard much of their friendliness and kindly ways from his sister-in-law and little niece, felt well inclined to agree in the general sentiment, as he sat by the cottage hearth on that stormy night, and silently listened to the conversation which was going on between Jem and his father and mother, who, in their simplicity, looked upon the stranger's presence as no restraint upon their family intercourse.

The present subject of discussion was an offer which Colonel St Clair had this evening made to Jem of the post of forester upon the Eaglescrag woods ; and the promised remuneration being considerably beyond what he had ever yet received at sea, and the idea of his residence at home a source of much comfort to his parents, it was this point that he had been so anxiously urged by Mr St Clair to consider well before deciding.

John Douglas was much gratified by the choice having fallen on his son. Jem was now but barely twenty years of age, and the office of forester extending to many departments of the working of the estate, which entailed responsibility

upon any one who held it, much steadiness of character was needful for the proper discharge of its duties ; and it was a proof of Colonel St Clair's confidence in Jem that he considered him capable of undertaking the post.

Jem himself, however, was in much doubt. Six voyages, and many a storm, had in no degree lessened his love for the ocean ; and his inclinations were still strongly enlisted on the side of the roving life which had become so natural to him. He was not insensible to the advantages set before him, but notwithstanding these, he felt it a hard matter to give up the bounding sense of freedom, and the excitement of maritime enterprise, for what seemed to him would be in comparison a monotonous and uninteresting mode of existence.

" Well, well, Jem, lad," said his father at length, " we'll let it be for to-night ; you'll take your own mind of it. I'll no press you, for maybe when I was like you I'd have thought it hard, too, to leave the salt water ; only if you can come to it any way, it'll be a glad day to your mother and me to see you settled down aside us."

" Ay, ay, indeed will it," rejoined the mother, who, with some difficulty, had refrained from

strenuously seconding the proposal; "it would just be the joy of my heart. But take it easy, laddie, I wouldna like to vex you," she added, as she watched her son's countenance deep in thought.

At the sound of her voice he looked up and smiled: "Dinna be feared, mother, I'll get over this by and by; we'll see about it to-morrow." And then he turned to Richard Harding, who was surveying the scene with much interest, and led him into a cordial talk on local matters, in which John Douglas and his wife very shortly joined.

In the midst of a eulogium which the latter was indulging in on various members of the St Clair family, Richard Harding suddenly said, "He's an uncommon fine boy that young Lionel; how old would he be, Mrs Douglas, when the Colonel came from abroad?"

"Nigh upon three year old," replied Mrs Douglas, "so far as I mind; but he was such a stirring laddie he aye seemed older-like than he really was; any way he would be near about that, and Eustace hardly a year behind him. Mr Lionel was the beautifulest bairn ever you saw, we all said when they landed out of the boat; I mind it

as well as if it had been yesterday, that there wasn't one to compare to him among them. And the mistress, poor thing, the tears came in her eyes when I told her, for thinking of the bairn she had lost out by there."

"Oh! she had more children, then?" said Richard Harding.

"Yes, there was another before Mr Lionel, and that made her more taken up with Lionel; I mind her telling me I mustn't think less of Mr Tom and Miss Ada for all Lionel being so bonnie; but as for the Colonel, he never could think enough of that laddie; morning, noon, and night, Mr Lionel was trotting after him up and down, and never in the way."

Richard Harding made some brief remark in reply, and then mused to himself for some time; after which, the hour being late, all retired to rest.

The storm continued to rage during the night; wind and rain never ceased to beat upon the roof of the little cottage; and about six in the morning Jem, who had slept later than usual, was roused by Richard Harding's voice speaking in a subdued tone.

"Get up, Jem," he said, "and come down to

the shore. Don't wake your father, but I'm nearly certain there's a ship out there on the rocks; I can't see it, but I heard a cry."

Jem needed no further bidding. Up he sprang, and within a very short time he and his friend were standing on the beach, where, amid the howling of the wind and the roaring of the water, there could yet be distinguished loud calls for help wafted across the waves, though, at first, the morning mist and the heavy rain made it impossible to discern the vessel from the crew of which they evidently proceeded.

The sun, however, was making its way through the drifting clouds, and, suddenly, under the influence of a bright gleam of light, the mist cleared away, and the rain at the same time abating, a small vessel appeared at a very short distance from land. She had struck upon the small rocks which abounded on the coast, and having been there for some hours without any shelter, all her masts had been carried away, and the position she now held made it very evident that she was fast giving way, and must sink within a very short time.

The tide was running high, and the waves were dashing over what remained of the vessel, and at

the moment when Richard Harding and Jem perceived it, the crew, apparently about half-a-dozen persons, were endeavouring, with great difficulty, to lower themselves into a small boat.

It was quite impossible to reach them so as to render any assistance ; but while Richard Harding stood on the shore, sending out words of encouragement, loud enough even to get the better of the wind and noisy water, Jem, bethinking himself of the only expedient possible, ran swiftly up again to the cottage, and reappeared on the shore with a long coil of rope in his hand.

He stood for an instant gazing at the little boat, which looked like a mere speck among the angry billows round it. "They'll hardly weather that reef," he said, as, tossed up and down by the breakers, it approached a range of rocks which, though completely out of sight just now, Jem knew to be somewhat higher and more dangerous than those beyond. "See here, Richard, if you and I hold together, we might get down on the flat rock there, and I might throw the rope to them."

"Ay, that's the only chance ; we'll try it," returned Richard. And accordingly, though in considerable peril themselves from the difficulty

of distinguishing the rocks in the deep water, and from the strength of the waves, Jem and he contrived to reach a point from whence they succeeded in throwing the coil of rope into the boat, where it was received with loud acclamations by the crew, who immediately prepared to fasten it around their shoulders and waists.

Only one had accomplished this when another violent squall arose, and a tremendous wave rolling in from beyond the rocks, the little boat was first lifted up, and then thrown over, the six men being at once immersed in the water.

By this time, the news of a vessel being cast on shore had become known among the few cottages scattered around, and several other people had collected. It was but little, however, that they could do for some minutes. Most of the men seemed to be expert swimmers, and notwithstanding the unusual force of the waves, one by one they succeeded in coming so near to the shore, that by means of those on the beach rushing in to their rescue, they were brought exhausted, and nearly prostrate, to land.

At last but one remained in the water, the youngest of the party, and the one round whom the rope had been fastened. He struggled man-

fully to make his way through the waves, but the rope impeded the action of his arms in swimming; and do what he would, he was constantly driven back, until the power of resistance was almost overcome. Suddenly, as the waves again came surging over him, he disappeared beneath them, and the spectators lost sight of him.

"He's gone!" exclaimed Jem, springing to the farthest point of the rocks, in hopes of the unfortunate boy's being carried within reach. But other eyes, as sharp, though not so experienced as Jem's, were marking the scene, and in the midst of the prevailing excitement, a voice called out, "There is the rope on this side!" and to the consternation of the bystanders, Lionel St Clair, who had come down the path from Woodbank unobserved, dashed into the water, a little farther along the shore, and, by a desperate effort, caught hold of the end of the rope which he had descried.

The waves, however, were too strong for him, and in another moment he would have been carried away, had not Richard Harding and Jem simultaneously, from different directions, thrown themselves into the water, and, by main force, pulled him out. Not, indeed, before he had accomplished his purpose of getting hold of the

rope, the end of which he still held firm in his hand ; and by this means, when Lionel himself was safe on shore, the form of the rapidly-drowning sailor was borne so close to the edge of the water, that another large wave brought him within reach of the friendly hands stretched out to save him, and very soon he too lay on the dry sand, though so utterly unconscious and still, that it seemed doubtful at first whether he were still alive.

His youthful appearance—for he did not look above eighteen—excited much sympathy among the spectators, who, notwithstanding Richard Harding's entreaties to keep farther off, and let him have air, crowded round to survey the stranger ; and when, at last, the latter opened his eyes feebly, and looked up in a bewildered manner, there was a general start, and exclamation of surprise. "It's Ned Harding ! sure as anything ; who would have thought it ?"

Richard, who had had his own suspicions from the first moment of distinguishing the figure of the seaman, signed for silence, as needful for the boy's more complete restoration, and Lionel was not as yet aware of the discovery ; for, on the pretext of at once procuring warm coverings and

reviving stimulants, Jem, knowing how anxious Miss St Clair would be, should news of the wreck reach her in her nephew's absence, hurried him off to Woodbank as soon as he had recovered sufficient breath to walk.

No one but Eliza was about at the cottage when Lionel and Jem reached it, and entered by the back way ; but when the news was told, she lost no time in letting her mistress know of what had happened, and in sending Jem back with all necessary appliances for conveying the young sailor thither without delay.

It was not the first occasion on which Woodbank had been a refuge for shipwrecked mariners ; and Miss St Clair being well skilled in the knowledge of what was right to be done, had all things prepared for Ned's reception in an incredibly short space of time, though naturally her first thought and care was for Lionel, lest any evil effects should ensue from his unusual exertions and exposure to the storm.

Lionel, for his part, thought very lightly of his own share in the matter. He laughed when Jem alluded to it, and said it was the jolliest adventure he had had for a long time ; and as to being wet, what did that signify ? If the boy only

got well, he would like to have it all over again; but he submitted very willingly to his aunt's precautions for his safety, and when she saw him so full of spirits, she could not suppose him to be at all the worse for his morning's encounter with the elements.

Jem, in the meanwhile, had returned to the shore, where he found considerable anxiety prevailing on account of the exceedingly faint condition of poor Ned, who, after manifesting the first symptoms of returning life, had sunk back into almost insensibility. A few drops of the wine which Jem brought, however, somewhat revived him; and, though still very weak, and apparently suffering from some injury to his left arm, his uncle thought they might venture to move him, as warmth and quiet would be the best restorative he could have.

"Now, Ned, don't you speak one word," Richard said, bending over him, as the boy looked up and feebly moved his lips. "You're quite safe among friends; and we're going to take you home, and get the doctor to you."

"Ay, and your mother too—I'll run for her; there now, Ned!" said Jem, in his cheery tones; "we'll have you all right presently!"

Ned, even if he had been allowed, was scarcely capable of replying. But several of the men lifted him with the greatest tenderness, and carried him very gently along the beach, and up the path to Woodbank; and when laid in a comfortable bed there, Richard Harding, from his frequent experience of such cases, felt sanguine of his speedy recovery.

Lionel's joy was great when, after the arrival of the party from the sands, he became aware that it was indeed his old acquaintance, Edward Harding, who had been thus happily rescued from danger; and he felt quite impatient to be allowed to go to him, and to hear whence he had come, and how he happened to be in that small vessel. But Dr Wilson's orders had been very imperative, that no one was to be admitted into Ned's room that day except his uncle and Jem; and as the prohibition extended even to Mrs Harding herself, Lionel could not be surprised at his exclusion.

"I must see him to-morrow, though, Auntie," he said, as he sat at tea that evening with Miss St Clair, Henry Delamere having by this time returned to Seaview; "for there will not be much time. I have only five days longer to stay, more's the pity!"

The knowledge, however, of Ned's identity in connection with his narrow escape, seemed to have given the whole affair a somewhat different aspect to Lionel's thoughtful mind. At the moment of peril, and directly afterwards, he had forgotten the seriousness of the danger in the excitement of contending with it; and, while ignorant of its being Ned, he had given but little thought to the person saved, in comparison of the interest of the attendant circumstances. But now the individual reality seemed to strike him in quite a different light, and to impress him in the retrospect far more forcibly than the scene itself had done.

Thus, when, next morning, permission was given for Ned to sit by the fire in the kitchen, and for Lionel to go in for a few minutes to see him, the interview between them was rather different from what the latter had anticipated. Ned was still pale and languid from his recent battle with the waves, and, though he smiled when Lionel entered with something of his former roguish expression, he was yet in some respects very different from the unthinking fearless boy who had gone forth from his home two years ago.

Lionel could not but observe the alteration,

but he took no notice ; and sitting down beside Ned, began talking cheerfully, and asking questions about the wrecked vessel and its crew. Fortunately Ned was still ignorant of Lionel's attempts to rescue him on the previous day, so that there was no consciousness on that point to come between them ; but it was very evident that he rather avoided giving any explanation of why he was in the vessel at all, and Lionel felt inclined to fear that he had some cause to be ashamed of his position there.

Not much more could be said, Ned being forbidden to-day to talk for long at a time ; and Lionel, having promised to pay him a longer visit in his mother's cottage, whither his uncle was to remove him in the afternoon, had left the kitchen, and was running out at the back door, on his way to some of his usual haunts, when he met Mrs Harding coming across the poultry-yard.

She stopped at the sight of him ; and after a brief enquiry after Ned, of whom she had already heard that morning, and a friendly word or two concerning her friends in the Isle of Wight, whom Lionel had occasionally seen, she ventured to thank him for his efforts on Ned's behalf.

Lionel coloured directly, and looked at her as

if half surprised. "Oh no, Nelly," he said, "pray don't thank me. I never knew it was Ned at all. I only made a plunge at the rope when I saw it, and I believe I should have been drowned myself if it hadn't been for your brother-in-law and Jem; it was all their doing. As it is," he went on hurriedly, "I shall be off to Seaview almost directly. I've had famous long holidays this time. Mr Clifford gave me a month longer, while they were repairing the house—so it has been awfully jolly; but I shall have to go now. I'll come and see you first, though, Nelly, and take anything you like to your people there. They've got the jolliest little cottage ever I saw; it's a perfect gem of a place, and such roses! But I'm keeping you from Ned. So, good-bye for just now—I am so glad Ned is back again;" and waving his hand, Lionel sprung over the gate, and bounded up the hill into the woods beyond, where he generally roamed about half the morning.

Mrs Harding looked after him as he disappeared, with his bright face and active movements, with a smile of fond admiration; then she turned towards the house, and prepared for the first meeting with her wandering boy.

A day or two subsequently, in the afternoon, Ned was seated by his mother's fireside, Mrs Harding opposite to him, with her knitting, busily at work, and Kate, on a little stool, between them. The latter had grown a good deal taller, and looked much stronger; but her face, as she gazed at her brother with all her old proud affection, had still the innocent guileless expression, and the look of unconscious trust and confidence, that had perhaps more real influence over the boy's rough spirit, than even he himself was aware of.

"Now, isn't it nice, Ned?" the little girl said, trying hard to interest her brother in her doings at the village-school. "I have liked the school so much better since Miss Morton came to live with the minister, because we learn to sew now; and we get singing too—Miss Morton comes three times a week, in the afternoon, to teach us. Isn't that good of her, Ned?"

"Yes, I daresay," replied Ned, rather gruffly; "but she wouldn't do it unless she liked it."

"Oh, no; but, Ned, I think it is so good of her to like it," returned Kate. "You know, it can't be much pleasure to a lady like her. Some of the little ones are so stupid at first, and give her

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a great deal of trouble, and yet she never minds a bit."

"And you, being one of the big ones, are *so* clever, I suppose, and give her *no* trouble?" said Ned, pulling his sister's light brown hair.

"No, no, Ned, I didn't mean that—we all give her plenty of trouble; but you know, mother has taught me to sew ever since I was quite little, before you ever went away, Neddy, so I would be stupid indeed, if I didn't know more about it than the wee ones who have only just begun."

"I wonder if Miss Morton would teach me to sew—it would be awfully convenient on board ship. Has she a class for boys? or does Mr Tom teach them?"

Katie laughed. "No, you silly Ned, of course not, not to sew; but you might go to Mr Tom's class on Sundays if you liked. Mightn't he, mother?"

"Yes, indeed," Mrs Harding replied, without looking up from her work, "when he is well, and able to walk so far; at least, I know Mr Tom would welcome him if he did."

"Catch me!" said Ned, in an undertone. "If I want preaching, I can go to the kirk."

Kate was rather alarmed at this appearance of

return to her brother's old defiant manner, which had not as yet manifested itself since his arrival; but she had tact enough not to press the matter, and hastened to change the subject.

"I'll tell you what Miss Morton could do though, Ned," she said; "if you stay all winter, she would teach you to sing beautiful."

It was Ned's turn to laugh now. "I daresay she would, Katie, about as beautiful as a raven or an owl: I left my voice behind me in the Pacific. But if she's such a grand teacher, you sing something now, and let me hear what it's like."

"Oh, yes, Ned; will I sing a hymn or a song? Mother likes the hymns best, but some of the songs are very pretty too."

"Sing a song first," said her mother, "and the hymn afterwards, and then Ned can see which he likes best. Won't that do, dear?" she added, putting her hand on Ned's arm.

"Oh, yes, mother," he replied, wearily. "I just want to hear her sing. I don't care what the words are."

"Well, then, I will sing 'Sweet Music' first," said Kate; "that was the last I learned."

And in a very soft clear voice, Kate sang the following words:—

"Seek'st thou sweet music, gentle child,
To soothe thee in the desert wild
Of this rough world, where there seems none
To call the orphan boy his own ?

"Seek'st thou sweet music ? seek it still ;
No rarer joy thy heart can fill ;
But thou shalt find it nearer far
Than in the realms of moon or star.

"If first thine own pure song arise
In trusting gladness to the skies,
Deep echoes of response shall come
To greet thee from a Father's home.

"Only, when turned to life again,
Forget thou not thine upward strain.
Let loving words and actions be
The refrain of that melody.

"Then mayest thou hear, in Nature's voice,
Tones that shall make thy heart rejoice ;
The murm'ring brook, the whisp'ring trees,
Shall bear sweet music on the breeze.

"And ev'n amidst thy comrades' glee
Thou 'lt trace faint sounds of harmony,
Shadow'd in kindly deeds which prove
The first notes of the song of love.

"So shall sweet music gild thy lot,
Thy loneliness be all forgot ;
So shalt thou strike, 'mid Earth's employ,
The op'ning chords of Heaven's joy."

"I don't call that a song," was Ned's ungracious remark when his little sister stopped, "it's more like a hymn;" then seeing Kate looked disappointed, he added more gently, "But it's real bonnie, and you're a capital singer; come now, give us something different."

Kate was comforted directly, and sang with great spirit one of her holiday ditties, which seemed to please Ned better, for he joined in occasionally, with a very gruff bass.

"Let us haste to the mountains,
All covered with heather;
Let us drink of the fountains,
And breathe the fresh air.
The wild goats are bounding,
The echoes resounding;
Let us play here together,
Till Evening draws near.

"Let us cull the wild flowers,
And wreath them together,
While we rest in the bowers
Which Nature has made.
The green mountain ash boughs,
The hawthorn and wild rose—
How sweet in this weather,
To bask in their shade!

"But we are forgetting—
So pleasant these hours—

That the sun is just setting,
And Evening has come.
The shadows are bending,
The dew is descending,
So, laden with flowers,
We all hasten home."

Just as Katie sung the last words, the door of the cottage was pushed gently open, and Lionel appeared on the threshold.

"Just in time, Kate," he said, taking off his straw hat, and brushing his curly hair off his forehead, "just in time to hear the end of your pretty song; I've had such a run from Eaglescrag. Tom sent me down to ask if you would come up to the Tower this afternoon, Nelly; they're all at sixes and sevens there; you know papa has been away for a few days, and he came home last night, and now the cook has taken herself off, and the nursery-maid, Jackson, is in a huff; and Ada and Julia are at their wits' ends. So they thought, if Ned was pretty well, you would perhaps come up and help them?"

"Oh, yes, my dear, I'll do that with pleasure," replied the widow, "but they should have sent sooner. I would have gone in the morning if I had known."

"Oh, they wanted Eustace to come before

breakfast, I believe," returned Lionel, laughing, "but he wouldn't; he said it was none of his business. But then you see, Nelly, they are partly busy getting things ready for me to take away, so I was in duty bound to come and get you for them, if I could; and I was to say that your brother-in-law would be there to see you home at night.—Do you feel better to-day, Ned? Getting all right?"

Mrs Harding prepared with alacrity to attend to the summons, and Lionel having promised to sit beside Ned for a few minutes, Katie, to her great delight, was free to accompany her mother for part of the way.

When the two lads were thus left alone, Ned was at first very silent. He had by this time heard the particulars about the shipwreck from his mother, and the consciousness that he ought to make some acknowledgment of Lionel's part in it, made him moody and constrained in manner.

But Lionel, having no such thought in his mind, was all eagerness to hear something of the ways and customs of foreign lands, and by drawing Ned on to talk of this, the conversation soon became more animated between them.

At last Ned suddenly stopped in his descrip-



tions, and broke off with, "I say, Mr Lionel, it was awful good in you to get yourself drenched, that day, trying to help me. I never knew till mother told me, but I've thought a deal of you, and I'd like to do you a good turn for it."

"No, no, Ned, don't think of that," said Lionel, "there's nothing to talk about; go on with what you are telling me."

"Oh, that'll keep well enough," returned Ned, "but you see, Mr Lionel, I've got hold of a secret; and if you'll promise never to let on that I told you, I'll put you up to it."

"A secret, Ned! what is it?" exclaimed Lionel, quite interested. "I won't tell any one, you may be sure of that; at least," he added, with sudden recollection, "unless I ought."

"Will you promise not to tell the Colonel or Mr Tom, or the lady at the Cottage?" said Ned, looking intently at Lionel with a dark look in his brown eyes, which the latter did not quite like.

"Not papa or Tom?" he said, in a doubtful tone. "Why, Ned, what can they have to do with any secret of yours? I won't tell them if you don't want; but I don't believe they would care to know if I did."

"Ah! wouldn't they? I can tell you, Mr Lionel, it is more about you than me."

"More about me! why, Ned, that must be nonsense—you can't know any secret about me." And Lionel laughed. "Come, tell me, like a good fellow, what it is, and then it won't be a secret any longer."

"No: I'll not tell till you promise to keep it to yourself," was Ned's reply.

Lionel saw that, in Ned's imagination, at least, the matter was more serious than he had at first supposed, and he was strongly tempted to give the required promise, and to hear all that could be told; but some feeling which he could scarcely define seemed to keep him back from doing so; and after a few moments' hesitation, during which he glanced out of the window, and perceived to his relief that Katie was returning, he got up, and holding out his hand to take leave, said, "Well, I think I won't hear it, then, Ned; I know you mean it kindly; but if there's any secret about me in the wind, papa will tell me best himself. Good-bye." And before Ned had recovered from his astonishment at Lionel's want of curiosity, the latter was speeding over the moor, passing Kate with some laughing words, and never slacken-

ing his pace till he disappeared into the woods of Eaglescrag.

Later in the evening of the same day, Lionel and Eustace were enjoying themselves together, crouching over the fire in their aunt's little drawing-room, Miss St Clair being engaged in another part of the house.

Lionel was talking of Ned and his secret. "You know, Eu," he said, "I believe myself that it's all humbug; but I wouldn't let him tell it for fear of making mischief."

"O Leo! why didn't you?" said Eustace, to whom the idea of a secret was delightful; "it would have been such fun! you can't tell what it is—and about you, too! If I had been there, wouldn't I have got it out of Master Ned?"

"I don't believe it's anything at all," returned Lionel; "but if it is, we'll hear it time enough. If he had told me straight out I would have listened, but I could not promise to keep it from papa and Tom."

"Why not?" said Eustace; "it was not your fault if he chose to talk about it."

Lionel looked thoughtfully into the fire for some minutes ere he spoke; then he said, "Oh, well, perhaps not, but that's my idea of it, Eu; so

Ned must just keep the secret for his own delectation in the meanwhile. And here comes Aunt Lily!—and tea too.”

No more passed on that subject between the two boys; and Lionel thought that Eustace had come to the same conclusion as he himself had done—but it was not so. Eustace saw that it would be in vain to urge Lionel to any other course, but deep down in his mind he resolved to make every effort in his own power for the discovery of this secret, whatever it was.

For the next day or two, however, Lionel's departure for Seaview was the main point of interest in both households; and though in most respects the going thither was a much more pleasurable prospect to himself than it had formerly been, still Lionel had one new cause of anxiety on this occasion, in the precarious state of his father's health, which, in moments of quietness, saddened and subdued him in no ordinary degree—the more so that, there being no positive illness, nothing was said of it from day to day among the family generally.

Tom indeed, when Lionel confided his misgivings to him, replied in a tone of such despondency, as convinced the latter that his fears were

not without foundation ; and Miss St Clair also looked anxious and dispirited ; but nothing more explicit was said, and the day of Lionel's setting out arrived. In the early morning he ran over to Eaglescrag to take leave. Colonel St Clair was not yet up, but he sent for his boy to come to him, and seemed particularly bright and cheerful ; so that, had it not been for a peculiar look of wistful tenderness in his gentle blue eyes as he said farewell, Lionel would have left him quite cheered, and encouraged to hope the best.

As it was, the impression of that moment was one he never afterwards lost.

" You will tell me, Tom, won't you, if you think he is worse," were Lionel's parting words to his elder brother, " you will not hide anything from me."

" No, no—no indeed, my dear Lionel," replied Tom, as, with his arm twined round his young brother's neck, they stood together for a moment at the stile, ere Lionel pursued his way back to Woodbank ; " I will write myself often, and let you know how he goes on ; he may rally much more than we expect. Good-bye, my boy, we shall miss you very much."

And as Lionel hastened across the fields, each

time he turned his head to catch another glimpse of his home, he still saw Tom leaning over the stile, following him with his eyes, and waving his hand in token of adieu once more.

Eustace went to Woodbank in the little boat, and accompanied Lionel to the steamer.

On his return to the shore, after watching to see the last curl of smoke vanish round the Point, he turned up a narrow path which led him past Woodbank, and by a circuitous route to Mrs Harding's cottage.

The day was very fine and warm for September, and Ned was sitting on a little bench outside the door.

This was exactly what Eustace wished ; he was rather afraid of Mrs Harding, not being at all sure that she would approve of his present purpose.

The widow came to the door as he walked up the path, and looked both surprised and pleased at the sight of him, for Eustace was not so frequent a visitor as Lionel.

" Won't you come in, Master Eustace ? " she said ; " or would you rather stay with Ned ? he's real well to-day."

" Oh ! I'll just stay here, thank you, Nelly.

I only came for a minute after seeing Lionel off."

Mrs Harding did not press him further, but it was evident that she did not wish the interview to be a private one, as she kept the door open, and came out every two or three minutes to make some remark.

At last, just as Eustace was beginning to be afraid he would fail of his aim, a man with carpenter's tools in his hand came up to the gate, and asked Mrs Harding to show him the broken part of the fence round her little field, as Mr St Clair had sent him to mend it.

Eustace and Ned being in this way given an opportunity for confidential talk if they wished it, the former lost no time in carrying out the intention with which he had come to the cottage.

"I say, Ned," he began, "what was that secret you were mentioning to Lionel? I did not say so to him; but was it about the papers?"

"Ay, was it," replied Ned, "but, Mr Eustace, you'll promise no to tell the Colonel. Mr Tom would be terrible angry if he knew."

Eustace had a conscience, though a somewhat dormant one; and on the first instant he felt as Lionel had done before, that Ned's expressed

conviction was a decided reason for letting the matter rest. But his self-will was as strong as his spirit of curiosity; and when this opening for gratifying it was before him, he would not, like his more noble-minded brother, resist the impulse to further enquiry.

"Oh, well," he said, "I don't care much for Tom; and, besides, he shall never know. I will not tell any one, Ned, if you will only trust me. Just whisper it to me, do, Ned, before your mother comes back."

Poor Eustace! Bent as he was upon having his own way, what would he not have given, a few minutes later, that those whispered words had never been spoken?

Edward put his mouth close to Eustace's ear, and whispered low. It was but one short sentence, soon uttered, but the effect upon his listener was of a nature little anticipated by the thoughtless sailor boy.

Eustace started violently, and then became so pale, that Ned for a moment thought he was going to faint; but, by a great effort, he recovered himself directly, and, his colour returning, he looked round to see if any one were near, and then in a hurried tone said, "Oh, no, Ned,

you must have mistaken. It can't be true; it mustn't be true!"

"Well, I can't say for that, sir; but it's my belief it's true; and then I told you of believed it too, or they wouldn't have said what they did. I heard it as plain as I hear you now. But mind, this is all between you and me, sir."

"Oh, yes," said Eustace, with a sigh which was a sort of gasp. "No fear of my telling that. Oh, dear! how could"—but here the sight of Mrs Harding returning cut him short; and, getting up hastily, he went to meet her, and after exchanging a few words of no special import, set off to return home.

The widow observed his manner, and thought to herself that he seemed in unusual haste to be gone; but, though she looked narrowly at her son when she rejoined him, Ned was too well versed in commanding his countenance, to afford her any clue to what had passed during her brief absence.

From that day, however, there came a change over Eustace, which lasted for many months, and of which every one round him took notice, but no one could understand. He had a quietness and gravity of manner which was quite foreign

to his usual habits; and when, a week or two after Lionel's departure, the time arrived for him also to return to school, instead of the grumbling and discontent which of late had been the ordinary accompaniments of that epoch, he prepared with the greatest alacrity for going, and left Eagles-crag so willingly, that those who remained behind were much inclined to think that in his present state of feeling he found any change a relief.

CHAPTER XII

THE TELEGRAM.

"Oh, please, papa, don't decide till Lionel comes, and Henry Delamere—Mr Delamere, I mean. I feel so sure they would like the concert best," said Violet Clifford, as she stood by her father's side one bright day in the second spring that had come round since Lionel's last visit to Eaglescrag; and looked out on the busy scene of constant movement, which is the daily life of London, even in its quieter West-end localities.

"I don't think so," rejoined her brother, who was now a sturdy fellow of eleven years old, while Violet was still the same tall, slender girl, with lily-white skin and hazel eyes. "I don't think so," he repeated, as he mounted the arm of a sofa behind his father and sister; "my sensations tell me that Lionel would like the Polytechnic better; he has often said that he wanted

to see it, and it's selfish of you, Violet, to try to prevent his going."

"But Lionel is very fond of music—I know he is," said Violet, meekly; "and you would like the concert too, Johnnie."

"No, I shouldn't, when I want to go somewhere else, Miss Violet; does not your sagacity perceive that?"

"But, Johnnie, I think Violet is right," said Mr Clifford. "We had better wait till we have all our party together, and see what the general opinion is. The Polytechnic is open every day, so we need not miss it altogether by going to the concert."

"But what if I don't like the concert, papa? Mamma told me, before we came, that it was all grave music—that's no fun at all—it will be just like going to church; I can do that at home."

Mr Clifford smiled. "Not exactly, my boy; I think it would please you; but if we decide upon going, you shall have your choice; and, you know, we have a week before us. There will be time to see and hear a great deal besides."

"Oh, yes, papa," said Violet, "and then Johnnie is sure to like the Zoological Gardens,

where we are to go to-morrow. You know we can't all like exactly the same things, Johnnie."

"Can't we, madam?" said Johnnie, drawing himself up to his full height, "that is a most remarkable discovery! And so I am to go to a concert which *you* like, I suppose, and *you* are to go to the Zoological Gardens which *I* like! Nothing could be clearer. Papa! do you understand?"

"I understand that you are very likely to fall off that sofa, if you don't take care, and to break some of your aunt's pretty china by the way, in which case I am afraid the end would be that, whether you liked it or not, you would have to stay at home altogether."

"Oh!" exclaimed Johnnie, "what a fearful idea! Look out, Violet!" and with a sudden leap he alighted behind his father's chair, on the back of which he now took up his station.

"There now!" he said, "just in good time; my eyes are more discerning than yours, papa, or Violet's either, for truly I perceive *Mr* Delamere and Lionel coming round the corner in a cab."

"O Johnnie! do you?" said Violet, opening the window to have a better view. "Oh, yes, there is Lionel putting his head out to look at us."

"You will have to say *Mr St Clair* too, soon, Violet," said her father, smiling; "don't you know Lionel is almost seventeen?"

"Oh, but, papa, he seems just like Lionel still. Please don't make us change,—these holidays," said Violet, looking up so innocently in Mr Clifford's face, as he rose and stood behind her, that he could not but smile again as he replied.

"Well, not these holidays, perhaps. We will let you have your liberty till Christmas; but when Lionel goes to college, we shall see how grand he will be."

"I don't believe it," said Johnnie, in a confident tone; "Lionel will never be grand. He is not like Townsend; and he is not nearly so grave as Delamere; and, whatever Violet does, I mean to call him Lionel all my life."

"Well, I don't suppose it will make much difference what a *harum-scarum* like you calls him," returned Mr Clifford; "but jump down now, my boy, and don't chatter quite so fast. Here they come."

The door of the room opened, and the two youths entered, both considerably altered in appearance since they spent the summer together at Woodbank. Henry Delamere having been at Ox-

ford for the last six months, and having therefore entered upon all the privileges of manhood, while Lionel, though his bright young face retained much of its boyish look, and his figure was very slight, had yet grown so tall, and had so much ease and gracefulness of manner, as to seem nearly entitled to the same distinction.

The two friends had, at this time, just returned from a visit of a few days to Henry's uncle, who, having left India and settled in England, had now a home to offer his nephew; and as it had been a long-talked-of project, that Mr Clifford should take his two elder children to London for a week during the Easter vacation, at the earnest entreaty of the latter, Henry and Lionel were included in the treat.

The period which had elapsed since Lionel's last visit to the north had been one of much interest and anxiety. Colonel St Clair, having spent nearly a year in the softer climate of Devonshire, and rallied far beyond the expectations of his family, felt himself so improved in health that he had ventured to return to Eaglescrag in the previous October, and had remained there during the winter.

Lionel had visited him on several occasions in

Devonshire for a few days at a time ; but having spent his summer holidays that year in a tour to the lakes with Mr and Mrs Clifford and Violet, he had seen but little comparatively of his own family. Eustace, indeed, had been kindly asked by Mr Clifford to be of the party ; but for some reason or other, only known to himself, he had declined going ; and, indeed, he had of late seemed to avoid Lionel's society as much as he could, greatly to the latter's surprise and mortification. Emily, however, had been invited to go instead, and this had been a source of great pleasure both to herself and to Violet, who was delighted to have so lively a companion of her own age ; and to Lionel, too, his sister's society afforded much amusement and satisfaction.

Mr and Mrs St Clair, with little Arthur, had also joined the party for a few days at Keswick, on their way to Devonshire ; and Lionel had greatly enjoyed one or two rambles with Tom in the beautiful scenery of the Westmoreland mountains.

Tom was in much better spirits than he had been in the year before, and many a merry discussion passed between him and Lionel, though on this occasion their conversations never touched upon any point exactly personal.

This was probably owing in part to Lionel's growing reserve, and also to the rapid unfolding of his mind, which led him now to take an interest in many things beyond the sphere of home associations, and to form and express his opinions on questions of the day, in a way, and with a freshness and originality of idea, which highly entertained his brother, while it increased his hopes that Lionel was on the way to be, what he had formerly recommended to him as his aim, a whole man ! The matter of Lionel's future calling had not been directly mentioned between them ; but Tom gathered, from the general tone of his young brother's remarks, that, as yet, he was of the same mind as when they had, a year and a half previously, conversed on the subject.

Since then the brothers had not met, and this year Lionel was eagerly looking forward to another pleasant holiday in the Highlands.

Colonel St Clair had once or twice, in the course of correspondence, perceived signs of Lionel's wish to enter the church, and he had not plainly discouraged the idea further than by saying that Lionel had better go to Oxford first, and that, after some time spent there, he would be of a more fitting age to judge of what was advisable in the future.

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This was not exactly what Lionel wished, as he had other views in his own head ; but as yet he had not expressed them, and, consequently, he now expected to repair to Oxford after the following Christmas vacation.

Between Mr Clifford and his pupil the bond of mutual attraction which had marked the opening of their intercourse, was ever drawing them more closely to each other, and each short period of separation seemed only, when over, to have rendered their friendship more completely intimate and confidential.

This visit to London might be termed Lionel's first acquaintance with the great city ; for, though he had frequently spent a night there on his way to Seaview, he had never before remained longer ; and he was now of an age to appreciate the wonders of that wondrous place more thoroughly than he might have done had he been introduced to them sooner.

"Welcome back, both of you," said Mr Clifford, as Lionel followed his friend into the room. "You have arrived exactly at the right moment, Lionel. Violet and Johnnie cannot agree as to our sight-seeing, and the decision is to be referred to you."

"To me ! I am afraid I know very little about it, sir," returned Lionel ; "not much more than Johnnie does himself. But I will do my best. Come, Jack, what do you mean by setting up to know better than Violet ? Don't you know ladies always have their choice ?"

"Have they though !" said Johnnie. "I hope not. It would be very tiresome if they had—they always choose such stupid things ! Now, Lionel, tell me, wouldn't you rather go and see all the funny things at the Polytechnic than sit listening to a dull, solemn concert ?"

"That depends," replied Lionel. "Concerts are quite in my line, Johnnie ; and I should like it intensely if it is good, as it is almost sure to be. But, Johnnie, I can tell you what you would like better than either, and that is to go with Delamere and me to see a cricket-match at the famous cricket-ground."

"Oh ! wouldn't that be jolly ?" exclaimed Johnnie, his ideas turned at once into a new channel ; and he being thus quieted for the present, a discussion ensued between the other members of the party, which ended, as Violet privately decided in her own mind, in the most delightful and satisfactory manner possible.

Johnnie was to be allowed to go to the cricket-match with Henry and Lionel next day, while Mr Clifford and Violet attended the concert alone ; but as Lionel was very unwilling to give up the musical treat altogether, it was settled that tickets should also be procured for the oratorio of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which was announced to be given on the last evening of their proposed stay in London.

The intermediate days were to be spent in visiting as many places of interest as possible. Lionel was very desirous of seeing the Exhibition of the Royal Academy, and the water-colour drawings, for his artistic taste was as strong as ever, and as yet he had enjoyed but few opportunities of seeing good pictures.

Thus all was happily settled, and every one pleased ; and as Easter happened to have been very late, and the weather unusually warm and fine for the time of year—the trees and grass in the parks and gardens having just acquired that verdant freshness which is so beautiful, and yet lasts for so short a time in London—there seemed to be every prospect of the long-anticipated treat turning out a complete success.

And so it would indeed have been, had not

other circumstances intervened. Lionel paid many subsequent visits to the metropolis, but he always looked back to that first week of revelling among its delights with a recollection of more unmingled and vivid enjoyment than he ever felt again in connection with it. The impression, perhaps, was deepened by succeeding events.

The evening of the oratorio arrived, and all went together to hear it. Some of the most celebrated singers of the day were among the performers, and the choruses were full and most melodiously sustained. Even Johnnie allowed that it was not so very stupid after all ; and Lionel and Violet were entranced in an ecstasy of pleasure at the sweet sounds, the harmony of which was so far beyond anything they had ever heard before.

The simplicity and sweetness of the sacred words, as given in many of the solos and trios, lingered especially in Lionel's ear, as, the concert over, they drove home through the still crowded streets. He sprang out of the cab, as it stopped at the door in Wilton Crescent, and was gaily following Mr Clifford and Violet into the house, when, in one instant, all thoughts of enjoyment were dashed to the ground. The old servant,

Wilmot, who had accompanied his master to London, stepped forward to meet Lionel, an ominous-looking blue paper in his hand—"A telegram for you, sir; came half-an-hour ago."

Full of apprehension, Lionel tore the missive open. Only a few words :—

"Thomas St Clair to Lionel St Clair.—My father is seriously ill. Come at once by Glasgow route."

The first shock of this summons almost petrified Lionel. He seemed scarcely to know what he was doing or saying, and hardly understood his tutor's assurance that it was not possible for him to set off till the following morning, so that he had a few hours before him for rest, and for making all needful preparations. But Mr Clifford, with his native tenderness and judicious tact, arranged everything for him, and at length so far soothed and calmed him, that he was persuaded to go to bed, and to try to obtain a few hours' sleep before starting.

Lionel scarcely spoke. Mechanically he obeyed all Mr Clifford's instructions; and, when the morning came, he appeared pale and tired-looking, but yet quite collected and quiet.

Mr Clifford and Henry Delamere went with

him to the station, and it was not till he had taken leave of his tutor that his fortitude gave way; but when he found himself alone in the railway carriage, and as the train moved off, he saw his two kind friends on the platform following him with eyes full of concern on his account, Lionel threw himself down on the seat, and, secure from all observation, gave full vent to his hitherto pent-up feelings.

This in some measure did him good, and he was able to keep up pretty well for the rest of the journey, which, indeed, seemed like one long dream; but it did come to an end at last; and when Lionel found himself standing on the deck of the steamer, opposite Eaglescrag, and saw Tom and Eustace approaching in the little boat, and waving to him in a way which he knew meant he had not come too late, he felt as if half his troubles were over.

"This is well, Lionel," said Tom, as they rowed towards the shore. "My father is rather better. We hope that there is no immediate danger—to-day at least; but he is terribly weak, and has so longed to see you. I think the anxiety has made him worse."

Eustace did not say much, but he gazed at

Lionel with a look of yearning affection in his dark eyes, so different from his usual manner, that the latter was quite struck and touched by it. Ada received her brother with open arms as he entered the house. "O Lionel!" was all she could say; and then Emily came, followed by her Aunt Lily, all bent on doing their utmost to soften the shock of such an arrival. Even Julia was most kind and sympathising in manner.

Lionel's thoughts, however, were all in the sick-room. He was impatient to go thither at once; but after a little while Tom persuaded him to wait till the next morning. Colonel St Clair was relieved by hearing of his arrival, and they hoped he might sleep; and Lionel being himself a good deal fatigued, Tom thought the interview had better be postponed for a few hours.

On the following morning, when Lionel came down quite rested and refreshed to breakfast, he met Dr Wilson coming out of the dining-room. "Good morning," he said; "glad to see you, my boy. The Colonel has had a tolerable night, and the sooner you go to him the better."

Tom was not in the room, nor did he appear till the very silent party were just finishing breakfast, when he came in, and said, as he laid his

hand lightly on Lionel's shoulder, "Will you come with me now, Leo?"

Lionel followed him into the hall, and up stairs, where he stopped at Colonel St Clair's door, and in a low voice he said, "You will find him altered, Lionel. Promise me that whatever he says to you you will try to keep calm—he is so very weak. You must not stay above ten minutes."

There was a peculiar gentleness in Tom's manner, and Lionel felt overawed; but he answered firmly, "I will. You may trust me, Tom." And then Tom opened the door, and Lionel went in alone.


Colonel St Clair was sitting up in bed, supported by pillows. He looked very much reduced, and quite pale; but his eyes were bright, and his smile had its usual sweetness, as he held out both hands to welcome Lionel.

"My dear Lionel!" he said, embracing him fondly. "My darling boy, I feared I should not see you here again."

Lionel could not venture to speak, and for some minutes there was silence. Then Colonel St Clair asked a question or two about his journey, and remarked on his having grown, and at last he told him to be sure to remember him to

Mr Clifford, all in very broken, feeble accents ; and Lionel replied as quietly as he could ; but just as, in accordance with Tom's desire, the latter was beginning to think he had stayed long enough, Colonel St Clair drew from beneath his pillow his large old-fashioned gold watch, and a thick letter, carefully sealed. "Lionel," he said, "I am going to leave you very soon ; but, my dear child, the God of the fatherless will be with you. He *has* been with you in the past."

The sick man paused for a moment, as he met the look of surprise with which Lionel was regarding him ; but he went on again directly : "And now, before we part, I wish to tell you myself that there is, that there always has been, a secret concerning you and me, which will soon become known to you. I give you this letter, which you must promise me to open on the day you are seventeen. It will tell you all. I had hoped to spend that day with you, but it must not be. Tom will explain what you do not understand. Only, Lionel, dear, whatever you feel about it, *remember* I have ever loved you *more*, not less, than I seemed to do ; and you have been indeed a precious son to me. Never doubt that. I give you this watch to keep in memory of our many



happy days together, and Tom and Mr Cliffe will do all they can to supply my place."

Lionel took the letter and the watch, a having laid them on the little table which stood near, he leaned over the bed in silent reverent and sorrow. In looking back upon the scene afterwards, he often almost wondered how could have refrained from exclamations of astonishment and dismay, and he felt then that it had been by a great effort of self-command that he had done so; but Tom's caution, backed by his influence so long before established, had sealed his lips; and perhaps the dim foreboding of character and unknown evil which came over his mind even at that solemn moment, helped to make any open expression of his feelings difficult, and almost impossible.

Tom met him as he was leaving the room, with the letter and the watch in his hand. Lionel with a sudden impulse, clung to his brother convulsively. "O Tom!" he said, "you know."

"Yes, Lionel, I know," Tom answered, gently as if he had been speaking to little Arthur. "Don't mention it to any one else just now. I will tell you all, my poor fellow! I am so sorry for you."

A few days of mingled hope and fear succeeded, and then, on one stormy evening, when the sun was setting in lurid splendour over the ruffled waters of the bay, and heavy black clouds were hanging over mountains and rocks, the fatherless family of Colonel St Clair sat together by fire-light in the darkened library, and sought, by mutual tenderness and whispered words of love, to comfort each other for the absence of that centre round which all had till now more or less turned, as the mainspring of their domestic life.

Ada and Emily, who for the last few years had been their father's constant companions, and the sharers of his confidence, were at first almost inconsolable for his loss, and naturally the sympathy of all the others turned most warmly towards them ; but to each one it was a hard trial to part with a parent so deeply valued, and whose exceeding affectionateness of disposition had peculiarly endeared him to his own children.

But, though not of the immediate family, perhaps on none did the blow fall more heavily than it did on Miss St Clair, to whom the removal of her brother was the breaking of the last link which bound her to days gone by, and to the generation that had passed away. She was not

indeed without comfort as she thought of him, and, for herself, her brightest hopes and deepest trust were firmly anchored where no change could move them ; but yet, for a moment, the world looked dreary without the presence of the last companion of her youth ; and as she lay down to rest that night in her turret-room in the old Tower, and heard the waves dashing wildly upon the rocks beneath, ever in her fitful slumbers the words of England's poet would ring with a mournful cadence on her ear,—

“ Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea !
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Shall never come back to me !”



CHAPTER XIII.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST.

DEEP and sincere was the grief felt by the humble inhabitants of the Highland glen, when it became known among them that their kind friend and benefactor was indeed gone. Owing to his quiet reserved temperament, and also of late years to his feeble health, he had indeed held but little personal intercourse with them; but notwithstanding this, he had all along taken great interest in many of the farmers and villagers, and had often, even during his periods of absence, been very influential in furthering their interests.

More especially was his loss mourned in the families of John Douglas and Mrs Harding, the widow's attachment to her late mistress having given her a constant feeling of sympathy with all that concerned those of the name of St Clair; and John Douglas and his wife having, in a somewhat different way, been always in the service of the

family, were also bound up, heart and hand, in the latter's weal and woe.

The uncertainty, too, which Mrs Douglas felt as to future arrangements, and especially as to whether her favourite, Mr Tom, would continue to reside at Eaglescrag, greatly increased her concern, and when, a few days after Colonel St Clair's death, the trustees of the estate arrived at the Tower to attend the funeral, and afterwards returned to the house to have a private conference with Mr St Clair, her anxiety became so eager that she begged Jem, who was now established in his post as forester and under-steward, to go up in the evening of the next day and see if he could discover from Mr Lionel what had been the result of the interview.

Jem, however, on his return, reported that very little had transpired. He had seen Mr Lionel, but had heard nothing beyond the fact that Mr Tom would remain at the Tower for the present, and that there would be another meeting of the trustees in July, when all would be definitely arranged and made known.

"And it's my belief, mother," added Jem, seeing that Mrs Douglas looked far from satisfied, "that Mr Lionel knows no more himself."

Jem was right ; for that very afternoon, after all the strangers had departed, Tom called both Lionel and Eustace into the study, and after, with much kindness and consideration, telling them of the temporary arrangement that had been made, he concluded by saying, " In July you will know all I do about our mutual affairs. In the meanwhile, I will just tell you, as I know you will be anxious about it, that Ada and Emily are well provided for, and Emily will go to school in the autumn. As for you, Eustace, my boy, I must do my best to help you and Lionel. You will both go back to your studies just now : it will be the best thing for you. So don't be out of heart."

The boys tried to answer, but their hearts were full, and they could only say, in an unconnected manner, that they were glad their sisters would be comfortable. Tom was not surprised, knowing the anxiety that was burdening his mind, to see that Lionel was struggling with a multitude of conflicting feelings ; but Eustace's manner puzzled both his elder brother and Lionel. During the last few days, the latter had occasionally observed him regarding himself with the same expression that had so struck him on his first arrival ; but

beyond this, Eustace had given no sign of any wish to be either with Tom or Lionel, and though he had evidently felt his father's death very deeply, still Tom could not help suspecting that it was not altogether the cause of his altered demeanour.

To Lionel's great relief, his Aunt Lily asked him to spend two nights with her at Woodbank before setting out for Seaview. It was a welcome proposal, for the changed aspect of the house depressed his spirits. Even little Arthur's merriment failed to amuse him, and he dreaded the parting with Ada and Emily, the latter of whom followed him about the house and garden as if she found her only comfort in his society. He could not be certain, from Ada's manner, whether or not she had any knowledge of the mystery of the letter. She spoke and looked, he thought, differently from usual ; but then the sad scenes she had gone through might easily account for that ; and even if he had not been bound by a promise, he felt too sorry for her to inquire further.

On the day he was to go he lingered long, wandering about from room to room, gazing upon all the familiar objects as if bidding farewell to

them in their old associations, and hovering round Emily, unwilling to say good-bye ; but the word was spoken at last, and after spending a few minutes alone with Tom, during which, do what they would, the fortitude of both nearly broke down, Lionel tore himself away, and rushed, rather than ran, by his accustomed walk through the glen and over the hill to Woodbank.

“Oh, dear !” he said, drawing a long breath as he reached the shade and seclusion of the trees, “if it had not been for Tom how could I have borne it ?”

Never indeed had Lionel felt more grateful than he did now to this elder brother, for those judicious and friendly words which, nearly four years ago, had been the means of giving an impulse to his first efforts after self-control. The habit was greatly fixed and strengthened now, and the suspense and excitement roused in his mind by all that had passed within the past week, had shown him how much need he had to strive after it still ; but the very struggle this consciousness occasioned, led his thoughts back to that first trial of his boyhood, and taught him to value more than ever the friend who had then so opportunely come to his aid.

Musing on this he pursued his walk, the sweet spring air, and quiet murmur of sounds, tending to calm his agitated feelings ; and the path not being much frequented, he met no one till, on springing up the stile at the top, Ned Harding suddenly appeared, close to the lowest step on the other side. He was employed in widening the ditch.

With the exception of one short trip, Ned had remained at home since the time of the shipwreck, earning what he could by day-work ; and though he still spoke of returning to sea, his mother, and all who knew him, perceived that his imminent danger and narrow escape on that occasion had considerably diminished his zeal for a maritime life ; and having, as he had at last reluctantly admitted, already lost credit by insubordination on board his own vessel, which had led to his dismissal, there seemed little likelihood of his roving again. And, though his gains were but small at present, his present course kept him quiet and in some degree under control, and his mother felt encouraged to hope that gradually she might have the comfort of seeing his unruly spirit regulated by better motives and principles than had ever as yet had any influence over him.

It was so unusual for Ned to condescend to show any outward mark of respect for the junior branches of the St Clair family, that Lionel was rather surprised on meeting him now, to see that he touched his cap with considerable deference, and came up out of his ditch as if hoping to be spoken to.

"Hollo ! Ned, is it you ?" said Lionel, instantly recollecting that their last encounter had been at the little cottage, when he had refused to hear Ned's secret. "So we are to have you at home now, I hear. Have you had enough of the sea ?"

Ned fidgetted with the handle of his spade, and then said rather sulkily, "I don't know, sir ; I like the sea well enough, but I'm weary of being aye bidden to give it up."

Lionel, though not much disposed for merri-ment, could not help laughing at the lad's discon-solate tone. "That's a hard case, certainly, Ned," he said ; "but there's an easy way to get out of it ; and if you are better off at home it won't matter."

"Oh, I'm getting on fine ; and maybe after a bit I'll look about me again. And I say, Mr Lionel, if there's anything I can do for you

hereabouts when you come back I'll do my mind."

"Thank you, Ned, that is very good of you," said Lionel, looking, however, rather surprised. "I don't think it is very likely, though, that I need much done for me here; everything has changed now, you know, and there is no spot where I may land after I leave my tutor's. I shall see you in July, I hope, so good-bye;" with a friendly nod Lionel ran off, leaving the other apparently in much amazement at his last words. He was looking after him ere resuming his digging.

The little incident had been of service in settling the mind of Lionel, and by the time he arrived at Winton bank, Miss St Clair was pleased to see that he appeared to be in tolerable spirits. The evening and day which succeeded, were soothing to both aunt and nephew; nothing important passed between them as to the unopened letter; but Lionel felt convinced that Aunt was well acquainted with its contents, and he was more at ease with her in consequence.

On the last evening, after tea, having packed up his possessions to be ready for next morning's start, he asked if he might look over his favourite book of pictures once more, and his

having consented, and the book being laid on the table, he turned over its pages for some time, talking as he had been wont to do of the various likenesses and scenes.

At last he became silent, and Miss St Clair, on glancing at him to discover the cause, perceived that the book was open at the likeness which had formerly so deeply rivetted his attention.

For nearly half an hour he sat leaning his head on his hand, his eyes fixed upon the book before him. His aunt longed to know what was passing in his mind, but she would not disturb him. Suddenly, however, he raised his head, and their eyes met ; after an instant's pause, Lionel said, in a tone of much meaning, " Aunt Lily, when I come back at Midsummer, will you tell me the story of this picture ? "

And Miss St Clair answered, " Yes, Lionel, I will. "

Lionel's subsequent life at Seaview for the next two months may be easily imagined ; his elastic boy-spirit, and active enquiring mind, could not continuously be crushed, even under the pressure of suspense and uncertainty ; and thus, though sad memories of recent sorrow, and many surmises as to the future—dim visions of the coming truth to be disclosed, along with a nameless dread of

what that truth might be—were floating in his thoughts, and recurring from time to time in his moments of solitude, but little trace of such feelings was visible in his general demeanour; and Mr Clifford, thinking his occasionally subdued spirits quite natural under the circumstances, and seeing him once more the leader in cricket-field and playground, as animated as ever in study and perhaps even more than ever the life of his merry band of followers, felt sanguine of the eventual good results of all these vicissitudes in his pupil's opening youth.

Most of the boys who had been Lionel's companions on his first going to Seaview, he now left it; indeed, Edwin Temple and his cousin Morgan Lewis were the only ones senior to him who remained, the others being all younger; but these latter, having joined the school year by year, Lionel knew each one intimately; and enjoying, as he did, so large a share of Mr Clifford's personal friendship, and the ease of his domestic circle, he never felt lonely now among them.

One holiday evening, about a week before the Midsummer breaking up, Lionel had wandered over the sands at low water, to a range of rocks far from the shore, where he seated himself on

smooth ledge to enjoy Bruce's Travels in Abyssinia, which he had begged from Mr Clifford's library.

The other boys were shell-hunting, and running races on the firmer sand near the rocks ; and, as Lionel was often now known to prefer being alone for a time, none of them had approached his retreat ; and so engrossed had he become with his book, that he never heard a light step which came tripping over the rocks, nor was aware of any one being near, till the flutter of a white dress rustling close beside him startled him so greatly, that he nearly let his book fall into the water.

On looking up, he saw Violet standing very near him: she laughed merrily at having so taken him by surprise.

"I did not mean to do that, Lionel," she said ;
"I am glad the book is safe."

"Oh, it was stupid of me," replied Lionel, springing to help her to the spot where he had taken up his station. "But how ever did you come over those slippery rocks alone?"

"Somehow or other," returned Violet, playfully, and holding up a little boot which bore very decided marks of contact with salt water. "Here I am, at any rate, and, Lionel, I only came because I wanted to tell you something so very nice, I do

hope you will like it ; at least *I* think it is nice. Papa has just been telling me that he and mamma have been invited to go to your place in Scotland just at the time you go—Eaglescave, isn't it ? Oh no, I remember, Eaglescrag," she added, as Lionel smiled ; "and then, Lionel, only think, papa says Mr St Clair has been so very good as to ask me to go too ; will not that be delightful ? Papa says he cannot refuse Mr St Clair ; so I shall see Emily, and all those beautiful rocks and hills you told me about ?"

Lionel's kindling countenance betrayed very unmistakable pleasure at this intelligence, though his expressions of satisfaction were not quite so rapturous as Violet perhaps hoped and expected from him. The child of unbroken family happiness had no idea of the anxiety attending this return home.

"That will be very nice, indeed, Violet," Lionel said, making room for her to sit down upon the rock beside him. "Tom told me he might perhaps ask Mr Clifford this year, but I did not know it would be so soon. I hope the weather will be fine—Eaglescrag looks so beautiful in fine weather—and I shall teach you to climb hills, and to fish, and to do ever so many wonder-

ful things. I shall not let Emily keep you all to herself."

"Poor Emily!" said Violet, looking graver, her quick instinct leading her to discern beneath the light tone of Lionel's words a deeper vein of feeling, as he spoke of his home. "Mamma was afraid she might not like to have me just now; she must feel so sad this summer; not at all like me, you know, Lionel, with both papa and mamma!"

Lionel looked at Violet as she said this, her sweet guileless expression shaded by the recollection of her little friend's orphaned home. "Yes," he said, repressing a sigh, "home is not the same now, Violet—I wish you had seen it in the old days; but I am quite sure Emily will be delighted to see you,—you know she has no little sister."

And then the conversation took a turn which always pleased Violet, who thought it one of her greatest treats to listen to Lionel telling what she called "Eaglescrag stories," in which both became so interested that they were quite surprised at last to hear Mr Clifford's voice shouting to them to make haste home, for the tide had turned, and it was getting late besides.

He stood and watched them as they came to

gether, laughing and jumping over the rocks towards him, their bright young faces tinged by the reflection of the setting sun, and the boy looking for the moment as if care were as unknown to him as it had hitherto been to his little companion. It was a sight that touched Mr Clifford, and that sent his thoughts suddenly, almost as by an electric flash, both backward into the past, and forward into the unknown future. But he welcomed them with merry words, and they walked home in company to Seaview.

Gloriously beautiful was the early morning of the 24th of July. The lark was singing its first song, and the labourers were going forth to their daily toil, when Lionel opened the latticed window of his little room at Woodbank, and sat down beside it. The all-important letter, still unopened, lay near him, but his eyes were fixed upon the lovely prospect without. A cloud of mist had for a time covered the distant hills, but now the rays of the sun were sending their light and warmth in every direction, shining on the surface of the calm glassy waters, and reflected in the countless drops of sparkling dew on grass and shrubs.

Even then Lionel felt the exceeding beauty of the scene before him ; but his mind was perturbed, and more than once he put his hand upon the letter, as if about to read it, and then turned again to the window.

At last he resolutely took up the packet and broke the seal. " This is folly ! " he said to himself ; " whatever it be, it cannot be worse than I have fancied ! "

The packet contained two enclosures : one in an unknown hand ; the other, marked " To be read first," was in the handwriting of Colonel St Clair.

Lionel did not hesitate now ; he put the other paper aside, and opened Colonel St Clair's. It was not dated, but seemed to have been written recently. It ran as follows :—

" MY DEAREST LIONEL,—My fondly cherished child ! On this, your seventeenth birthday, it is my duty, and in some respects a hard one, to make known to you a fact in your personal history, which has, as yet, been concealed from you.

" I cannot tell what your feelings may be in learning it ; to many lads, it might be a source of pleasure, and it may be so to you—I cannot

say ; but yet, my Lionel, after all the happy intercourse you and I have enjoyed together, in the relation of parent and child, I do flatter myself that you, as well as I, will have some tender regrets in the extinction of that relationship, when I tell you that (though I could hardly have loved you better, had I been so), after all, I am not really your father !

“In order to enable you to understand this, and also to prove myself innocent of wilfully deceiving you, I must go back to a time long gone by, even to the days of my youth, when my two brothers and I sported together among the woods of Eaglescrag, even as Eustace and you have done of late years.


“I believe that you have always supposed me to have been the eldest son of my parents; but I was not so ; my brother, Lionel, was a year senior to me, I came next, and then your Aunt Lily, and Charles, who was the youngest of us.

“Lionel and I, as boys, were inseparable ; he was by far the bolder and the more energetic of the two—full of genius and spirit and life—and withal so handsome, and so frank and lively, that he won all hearts, and was literally adored,

both in his own home, and by all around—too much so, I fear, for his own good. With all his warmth of heart, and ready good nature, he had a most impetuous will; and this had been so much yielded to by our fond parents, that at last, when his boyhood was passed, he set their authority completely at defiance, at the same time inducing Charles to join him; and, after much extravagance and folly, the particulars of which I need not give you, both brothers went abroad, and though Charles at first wrote occasionally, for many years we heard little or nothing concerning either of them.

“In the meanwhile, I had been married for some time, and our dear mother had died. About twenty years ago now, I went on military duty to South America, leaving Tom, then a boy of eleven, under my father’s care, in Scotland, and taking Ada, then not four years old, with us.

“I was often, at that time, obliged to take long journeys into the interior of the country, and, in the course of one of these, I encountered Richard Harding; and recognising him as the brother of our forester at Eaglescrag, I learned from him, that he had lately heard of my two brothers, who were both settled as colonists



somewhere in the backwoods of Canada, and that both were married. Richard also mentioned that he believed Charles had had a child born very lately. The intelligence had been received from a man of the name of George Carpenter, who had been sent on an exploring excursion, and had thus fallen in with Richard Harding.

"These tidings were a relief to my mind, and I lost no time in communicating them to my father. My dear wife and I had now another little boy, who was born just after my return from the journey I have spoken of, and whom we named Lionel;—a lovely, most endearing child he was, whose sweet ways, and heavenly looks, have lived in my remembrance to this day.

"For one short year, we kept him with us. Then, suddenly, he was attacked by serious illness. A kind friend, who lived some way off, immediately took our Ada to her house, and my Blanche and I did all we could to save the life of our darling little Lionel. But it was in vain; the tender flower drooped and died; and so overwhelmed was his mother with grief for his loss, that I became most apprehensive of illness for her also.

"A few days after our precious treasure had

left us, and before we had been able to send any notice of what had happened to the friend who had taken Ada, we were sitting together one stormy, sultry evening, with doors and windows open, I trying in every way I could to soothe my wife's deep despondency and dejection. Suddenly, while listening sadly to the distant rumbling of the tropical thunder, mingled with the roar of wild beasts in the neighbouring forest, there fell upon our ears an infant's plaintive cry close at hand. The night was very dark, but taking the lamp in my hand, I went round the verandah, looking carefully into every corner, but at first I could see nothing.

"At last the cry was repeated, and the sound having at once roused my wife to energy, she called out to me, that she thought it came from the banian tree, which grew a few paces off.

"I followed her direction, and there, lying on the ground, beneath the shelter of the spreading branches, I found a little child, the very size of the one we had just lost.

"The little creature, when he heard my voice, changed his cry into a crow of delight, and, stretching out his hands towards me, said, quite distinctly, 'Papa!' then, without showing the

least fear, he allowed me to lift him up and to carry him into the house, where I placed him in the mother's arms which he afterwards learned to prize so highly.

“My first thought was to examine all the little garments he wore, in hopes of discovering some trace of whom he belonged to. To my astonishment, everything he had on was marked with the letters ‘L. St C.,’ and the little frock was also embroidered with our family crest.

“On looking more closely, I found a slip of paper fastened inside the frock. On it were written the words: ‘My son, Lionel, born July 24th. Arthur, keep my motherless babe, and make him your own, for a brother's sake.’

“We were greatly touched, and no less puzzled, by this communication. That the boy belonged to one of my brothers we felt convinced; but we could not tell which, though, as I recognised the handwriting of my brother Charles, and connected that fact with what we had already heard from Richard Harding, we were much inclined to think that the infant must be his. We were confirmed in this persuasion very shortly afterwards, by receiving, through a Canadian newspaper of old date, which accidentally fell into my

hands, the news of the death, from fever, first of Charles's wife, and then of himself.

"Under this belief, an additional though mournful interest attached to our little foundling, whom we now finally adopted ; and how dearly we came to love him can hardly be told. Eustace was born very soon after his arrival among us, and as Ada remained absent from us for some months, she had no idea, on her return, that the Lionel she found was not the brother she had formerly known.

"About this time, before I had been able to tell him of this occurrence, my father died ; and, owing to the absence of my elder brother, as well as to the estate's being slightly encumbered, he had deemed it advisable to put Eaglescrag under trust for a few years, I myself being named one of the trustees, and having leave to reside there occasionally for short periods at a time.

"I had never ceased, all this while, to prosecute enquiries after my brother Lionel, so far as I could, in the country where I had last heard of his being seen, but hitherto they had been without success. I had lost sight of Richard Harding, and my means of discovering any trace of Lionel were very small.

"Had I remained as long in America as I had

at first intended, I should have gone myself to make a personal search ; but the failing health of my beloved Blanche (your adopted mother, my Lionel), obliged me to throw up my command, and return home. We went for a short time to Eaglescrag, and there, a few months later, Emily was born.

“Six weeks after her birth, I was one morning greatly astonished by receiving a letter in the well-remembered handwriting of my brother Lionel. It was written from Australia, whither he had gone in hopes of recruiting his shattered health ; but finding himself rapidly fading away, without hope of recovery, he wrote to bid me farewell, and also to reveal to me the startling truth, that the child I had adopted was not Charles’s, but his. At the time he had sent it from him, his wife had died from the effects of the same fever which soon after carried off poor Charles, and as he himself was also very ill, and not expecting to live, he had been seized with such a dread of what might befall his child, were he left alone among strangers, that he had resolved to send him to me, though without allowing me to know his parentage. I do not know exactly what his reasons were. I think he felt then that his life had been wasted, and that

he would not wish his son to share in any reproach that might be cast upon his name. But better thoughts had come to him afterwards ; and now, when he hoped I might have learned to love his little Lionel for his own sake, he made all known to me. It was the man George Carpenter who conveyed the child to me, but as we afterwards discovered, he was at the time under some suspicion which made him unwilling to be seen, and this was the cause of his thus imperfectly fulfilling his trust.

“Lionel, I need scarcely tell you that this infant, who began his adventures in life so early, was indeed yourself, and that you are the son of my brother Lionel, and the possessor of Eaglescrag.

“The fact is known in confidence by the other trustees, and also by your Aunt Lily, and by nurse ; and by Mrs Harding, who, from her connection with Richard, we had to take into our counsels. I enclose the concluding portion of your father’s letter, that you may see for yourself in how difficult a position I was placed on receiving it.

“To add to my troubles, Tom, who was at this time an ardent, impetuous young sailor, had come home on a visit ; and, having heard of his uncle’s

letter, he became filled with indignation, not so much, I do him the justice to say, at discovering that you, not he, were the heir to Eaglescrag, as at the idea of concealing this from you, and allowing you to grow up under a false belief. So vehement was he, that he declared he would not stay at home to take part in the deception, and accordingly he left us quite suddenly, as you know, for Australia.

"He may have been right; perhaps I ought not to have brought you up in ignorance. I never intended to do so, had I not received your father's letter; but when he entreated me so earnestly to let you be entirely as my own during your childhood, I felt myself bound to attend to his wishes, especially as my own feelings for you were as fatherly as even he could desire.

"Tom and I have been busy, for the last few years, in collecting all the proofs of your title to succeed to Eaglescrag, and to take possession on your coming of age; and I think the chain of evidence is complete now. Richard Harding was of great use to us in finding out the man, George Carpenter, who was present at the marriage of your father and mother, and by means of whom we procured the certificates of that, and also

your birth and baptism. My brother died very shortly after his letter to me.

"Thus, I have done all I could to carry out your dear father's intentions regarding you : it was in accordance with his directions that you were sent to Mr Clifford's instead of to a more public school, and for the same reason you were not allowed to reside at Eaglescrag from the time of your going to school till now. You will understand this better after you have read his own words, and your Aunt Lily will tell you anything more you may wish to know.

"And now, my beloved boy,—my adopted son, farewell. You will, I trust, enjoy many happy years, as master of the Eaglescrag you love so well. I need not charge you to care for all within its bounds, nor especially to cherish for my sake the dear ones I may leave behind me ; I feel assured that you will do so in remembrance of him whom you have hitherto known as your most loving father,

ARTHUR ST CLAIR."

Nearly half-an-hour had passed away, and still Lionel sat by the window, the open letter in his hand, his eyes dimmed by burning tears which he struggled to keep back, and his countenance

The furniture on window
 and the preparations for
 the time of the Eliza, now a
 household being particularly near
 the door in the back door, as
 survey of the sea view.


The lapse of time had touch
 to years of Miss St Clair. Her
 smile, her smile less placid,
 two years previously; and if t
 anxiety visible in the longin
 : wants the opening between
 she knew the first signal would
 it was the anxiety of expectati
 less.

But she was not altogether a
 reclining upon the grass bes
 shooting-coat and straw-hat.
 Thomas St Clair, looking st
 rust than when first he re
 shores, but in no other respect
 ance or manner.

As the clock inside the h
 moved as if to go: "Well,
 you, Aunt Lily, to receive
 have him to yourself the:

pledge of that forgiveness, which I earnestly crave, and the assurance of which I was not permitted to receive from those against whom I had so grievously offended, I entreat you to keep my boy, and to save him, if you can, both from the desolation of a fatherless childhood, and also from the snares of popularity and distinction which proved to me so fatal. I had thought to spare him by keeping the secret for ever of his being mine ; but now, under the influence, I hope, of clearer light, I see it would be wrong to make him, in his innocence, suffer for his father's faults.

"I leave it all in your hands ; you will judge what is right to be done : but this much I do ask, Arthur, do not let my boy know his own history till he is seventeen. I would not have the brightness of his life shadowed sooner ; and if possible, till then, let him, when he is of an age to be sent from under your own roof, be under the care and tuition of my once and still dearly-valued friend Clifford. I dread the evils of a public school. Ask Clifford from me to train my Lionel to be what, in the days of our youthful friendship, he himself longed to see me, and what I might have been, had not my own wilful and wayward nature prevailed over every better influence.



"Oh, brother ! it cost me dear to part with my beauteous babe, the only joy I had left—the only legacy of his angel-mother ! To no one but yourself could I have given him up, and it was for his own good I did it. I feel assured that Blanche and you have taken him to your hearts already ; and I know you will not turn from him now because he belongs to your weak and erring brother Lionel. But the world has been a wilderness to me since I deprived myself of the sight of his cherub smiles. God grant that he and I may one day meet again in happiness, where there shall be no more parting !

"My strength is failing—Arthur, fare thee well ! And my sister Lily ! how often have I thought of her loving words—in all his wanderings the prodigal has remembered them ; and now at last, I trust, I feel he has returned, and has not found the doors of his Father's house closed against him.

"LIONEL HENRY ST CLAIR,"

The signature was written in a faltering hand as if the former part of the letter had been left unfinished, and the name added afterwards when the writer had felt that he could accomplish no more.

A cloud of doubt and distrust had been

Lionel's brow as he began the perusal of this letter, as if a feeling of impatience, amounting almost to dislike of this new relationship, which seemed to have been interposed between him and all that he had hitherto deemed most sacred, had entered his mind ; but as he proceeded it cleared away, and ere he reached the conclusion a very different expression pervaded his countenance. Notwithstanding the sharp pang which the discovery contained in the previous letter had caused him, while he read these touching words of one so long since passed away, the filial instinct began, strange as it appeared, to rise within him, and to respond to their pathetic appeal. He felt that he was indeed reading his own father's words. He had no doubt now.

Many times he read and re-read the letter, each time with deeper feeling than before, till at last it became almost more than he could bear, and he resolved to go out and refresh himself in the morning air before seeing any one.

It had been arranged on the evening before, that Tom should come to breakfast at Woodbank that morning ; but it still wanted more than an hour to the time, and Lionel hastened to make the most of the interval.

Slipping quietly out of the house, so as not to disturb his aunt, he first rushed down to the sea : a plunge in the light dancing waves, fanned by the cool morning breeze, had a wonderful effect in strengthening his excited nerves, and in bracing his energies and powers of thought.

As he came up from the shore, with bright face and shining hair, he met Jem Douglas driving a cart of gravel from the beach to Eaglescrag.

"Good morning, Mr Lionel," he said, touching his cap ; "you're early astir to-day, sir."

"Yes, rather," replied Lionel, stopping short ; "this is my birthday, Jem. I am seventeen to-day ;" he hesitated a moment, and then said, "I feel as if I had lived a lifetime since six this morning, Jem !"

Jem did not look so much surprised at this announcement as might have been expected ; he merely smiled, and said, good-humouredly, "Oh, that's too much at a time, sir ; you mustn't go so fast as that."

"O Jem ! you don't know," returned Lionel, rather sadly ; "I have had a great deal to think of."

"Oh, well, don't be down-hearted, sir ; there's a *silver lining* to every cloud, and we'll have the

sun shining bright upon you again one of these days—never fear !”

There was a pleasant warmth in Jem’s manner, and a ring of cheerfulness in his voice, which unconsciously to himself inspirited Lionel ; and it was with a light heart that he turned into the shrubbery ; and after strolling more slowly than was his wont through the thicket of larches and laurels, and along the grassy path, wet with dew, seated himself on the stile, which had been the scene of so many meetings and partings, there to wait for Tom’s arrival, and to ponder once more over the wonderful accumulation of new ideas, which had come before his mind within the last few hours.

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING.


THE musical clock in the hall at Eaglescrag was chiming half-past eight, when little Arthur, in brown Holland pinafore and straw hat, escaped from old nurse's watchful care at the foot of the winding staircase, and ran into the hall, on his way to pay his usual morning visit to the chickens.

The unwonted sight of his father, however, just taking down his hat from its peg, diverted his thoughts into a new direction: "O papa! may I go with you?"

"I think not, my boy; I am going out to breakfast."

"Out to breakfast, papa? and all by yourself?"

"No; not quite by myself. Aunt Lily is *going to breakfast with me.*"



"Aunt Dilly! Oh, that will be nice! I haven't seen Aunt Dilly for *such* a long time; mayn't I go, papa?"

"No, dear, not just now. Aunt Lily will be here some time to-day; and besides, you have had your breakfast, you know, Arthur."

Arthur murmured something of "being very hungry still, and he knew Aunt Dilly wouldn't mind that,—she never, never did;" but being well aware that when papa said No, it was meant in real earnest, he ceased to urge his request, and was satisfied by being allowed to go as far as the gate into the wood.

"And then I will come back with Uncle Eu," he said, in a tone of much satisfaction.

"With Eustace? Why, where is he, Arthur?" inquired Tom.

"He's talking to the black man. I saw him from the nursery window; and nurse said black man was very angry."

This had a mysterious sound; but when they reached the little bridge and gate leading into the wood, it was explained; for there, a little way from the gate, behind some large trees, talking so loud and fast that they did not hear any one approaching, were Eustace and Ned Harding,

along with another man, a stranger of peculiar appearance, who, though not quite answering to little Arthur's description, was yet so unusually dark as to look very different from other people.

As Tom stood for a moment at the gate surveying the group, he heard Ned say, in no very respectful tone, "You had as much to do with it as I had, Mr Eustace, and you promised you would never tell on me."

"I can't help it, Ned; you know I never thought of"—Eustace stopped short as he caught sight of his brother.

Tom stepped forward. He felt sorry for Eustace, whose pale looks betrayed his confusion. "Eustace," he said, "I want you to convey Arthur safely to the chicken-yard, and then come back here."

There was nothing imperious in Tom's tone, but yet Eustace did not seem to dream of disobeying; he went quietly away with Arthur, and Tom then turned to Ned and the stranger.

"May I ask," he said, addressing the latter, "what your business is?"

He spoke very quietly, but something in the question itself seemed to give great offence to the *man*.

"I would rather tell that to those who have a right to ask it," the latter replied, in a surly tone. "*You* have nothing to say here."

"Haven't I? Well, I have no wish to prove to you whether I have or not," returned Tom, fixing his eyes upon the stranger, who shrank from beneath his gaze, "but I advise you, for your own sake, to be civil while you are here, whatever your business may be. I can guess it, however, from the style of your remarks. You are George Carpenter, are you not?"

"If you know me so well, there's no need to tell you," was the reply.

"I recognised you from your own words, my friend," said Tom, quite unmoved. "I have no further acquaintance with you as yet, but I shall have occasion to request your presence in the Tower this afternoon, on business of importance. Till then, I wish you good morning.—Ned, this is your time for working; don't stand idling here."

And, beckoning to Eustace, who was now coming through the gate, to follow him, Tom turned up the path into the glen.

In silence the brothers trod the first steep ascent. When they reached the first level

ground Tom stopped, and leaned against a tree. "Eustace!" he said, laying his hand upon the boy's shoulder, now not far below his own; "when you wish to know family concerns, Eustace, why go to strangers rather than to those of your own house to discover them?"

Eustace looked down, moody and silent. Tom went on, "I know more of this, Eustace, than you think for; it is a long time now since you took the first step in it—since you helped Ned to open my pocket-book four years ago."

All Eustace's self-possession could not prevent his looking alarmed now; he moved as if to go, but Tom's hand was firmly placed on his shoulder, and he could not, without compromising his dignity more than he wished, free himself from it.

"No, Eustace, my boy, it won't do to shirk this now; you had better be persuaded to tell the whole to me frankly; or—you will have to do so this afternoon before Mr Seyton and the other trustees; as, you know, a great deal is involved in these trifles."

There was no help for it. Eustace never willingly acknowledged himself in the wrong, *and* would fain have avoided doing so now, but

he felt he had got into a difficulty, and he knew that his best chance with Tom was to be straightforward. "It was Ned brought it to me," he said, in a sulky, injured tone ; "I only opened it for fun."

"And then?" said Tom.

"Then I saw the paper, with George Carpenter's name, and Richard Harding's on it, and some dates, and the names of two places in America, and one or two words about—Lionel, and a property. I didn't know in the least what it meant then. I thought it was only that Lionel had been left some legacy or other. It wasn't anything so very bad. I left the paper where it was, and I told Ned to send it back to you at once. I knew you would be angry if I told you ; and I never said anything to Lionel. There was no harm done."

"Well, Eustace, I have no right to call you to account, except so far as is necessary. I leave it to your own conscience. You were very young then, and I should have hoped would not do the same now ; but there is more. You have carried on intercourse with Ned for some years about this matter ; and now, by his means, you have become acquainted with the great secret of poor Lionel's

life, which has so carefully been kept from him till the right time for revealing it arrived. Eustace, answer me, is it not so?"

Eustace coloured violently, and turned away, so that Tom could not see his face. For some minutes he did not reply, and Tom repeated the question, adding, "I have grieved for you too, Eustace, do not think I have forgotten you."

There was evidently a mingling of feelings in Eustace's mind as his brother said this; but he was too proud to betray any compunction for his roughness, so, without turning round, he said, in a lofty tone, "Oh, there's no need of that. Poor Lionel, indeed! *He* will be well enough off at any rate; but *I* don't care."

"I hope not, certainly," Tom replied, gravely. "I doubt if Lionel himself will take the same view of his new position as you seem to do; but Eustace," he added, seeing it was vain to say more in the boy's present humour, "I will leave it now. It was needful for some business arrangements that I should distinctly understand that you know the facts. I only ask you one more question. Can you tell me in what way Ned obtained his information?"

"He overheard a conversation between his

uncle and George Carpenter. He had run off, or been dismissed from his own vessel, and he got on board this one without any one knowing he was there. That is what he said ; but I didn't want him to tell me, Tom, I didn't, indeed," said Eustace, vehemently, as if wishing to persuade himself of what was opposed to his own convictions of what had really passed.

"Perhaps not: I hope not, Eustace ; but it would have been safer to make no beginning of underhand dealings."

Tom paused. He would have said more, in the hope of concluding the conversation in a more brotherly spirit, but Eustace looked impatient ; and, therefore, after giving him some directions about a ramble over the hills, projected for the amusement of the younger members of the family party in the afternoon of that day, Tom left him, somewhat surprised at his apparent stolidity, but yet not without hopes that it was in part at least assumed to conceal what he really thought and felt.

Lionel was sitting on the topmost step of the stile, his eyes fixed upon the shining waters which sparkled through the vistas formed by the overhanging trees, but his thoughts evidently far

away. At the sound of Tom's approaching footsteps, however, he turned round, and sprang down to welcome him.

In silence their hands clasped each other, and for some minutes no word was spoken.

"O Tom!" Lionel said at last. He hesitated a moment, and then, as if unable to repress what was at that moment the thought uppermost in his mind, he went on, "O Tom! and we are not brothers after all!"

There was no want of fraternal sympathy in the smile with which Tom answered him, "Never grieve for that, Leo; no such change will ever make any difference to you and me. We are brothers always, dear Lionel."

This warm assurance was some comfort to Lionel. "Thank you for saying that, Tom. I know, for my part, I shall never feel otherwise to you, and I should be very lonely without you. You see, Tom," he said, speaking hurriedly, as he leaned against the stile, and looked up in Tom's face, "It does not vex me quite so much about—dear papa, because we have lost him, at any rate; and I could never now think of him, but as he has always been to me—always, as long as I can remember. I feel more as if I had had two

fathers ;—but about all the rest of you it does seem strange. It *is* lonely for me, isn't it, Tom, to have no one that is *really* my own ? ”

“ That feeling will not last, Leo ; it is only your first impression. You will not think about it so much after a time. And I am quite sure none of us will care less for you.”


“ Not you, Tom, but—I don't know,” Lionel went on slowly, “ I never thought Julia cared very much for me ; and now, if I am to put you all out, she will like me less than ever.”

Tom seemed rather relieved at this turn of Lionel's ideas, for he laughed as he replied, “ No, no, my boy, don't be anxious about that, Julia will not bear malice ; and as to Eaglescrag, I never at any time really expected to succeed to it, although I behaved so foolishly and wrongly on the first announcement of your claim. I had always known that my uncle Lionel came first, and we did not hear of his death till his letter to my father arrived.”

“ Oh, yes, I see,” said Lionel, thoughtfully ; “ but it does seem wrong for me to come before you, unless ——. O Tom ! why did he not come home ? He might have lived longer then, and we might all have been so happy.”

"I was sure you would think of that, Leo," said Tom, "and so was my father. He did not wish to show you the first half of your own father's letter; but he begged me to tell you that, from hints contained in it, we suspected that there had been some unfair dealing; and, on further enquiry, we had every reason to conclude this to have been the case. Your father was involved in money affairs with people in America, whose interest it was to keep him there, and, taking advantage of his habitual carelessness as to letters and home affairs, as well as of his failing health, my grandfather's death was concealed from him till very shortly before he wrote that letter, when the shock had been so great to him as to accelerate his end. From his own words, I feel sure that, had he known in time of our grandfather's illness, he would have come then; and I think it was his being unable to do anything else in the way of reparation, that made him feel it a duty to acknowledge you to be his son. Poor fellow! the sorrow he expressed in the opening sentences of his letter was most touching. He certainly had his own share of the grief that he felt he had caused."

Lionel sighed deeply; and again they paused



in silence. Then Tom proposed that they should proceed to Woodbank, and, on the way, he turned the conversation to various matters of business which it was necessary that Lionel should now have explained to him, and for the settlement of which Mr Seyton and the other trustee were to be at the Tower that afternoon.

Unaccustomed as he was to anything of the kind, Lionel greatly disliked the prospect ; but when Tom told him that there would be very little for him to do or say personally, and that the meeting would not last very long, he resolved to muster up all the courage he could, and to do his utmost to understand the particulars which Tom was endeavouring to make clear to him.

His thoughts, however, were disposed to wander ; and, at last, just as they were turning the corner of the shrubbery, close to the cottage, Lionel suddenly stopped, and exclaimed, " Oh ! there 's one good thing ; I am so glad ! I never thought of it till this moment. Aunt Lily is just the same ! "

" Oh, yes ! " responded Tom, heartily. " No change in Aunt Lily. And there she is, looking out for us. We have kept you waiting, dear old lady, have we not ? " he added, as he stepped

into the drawing-room over the low window-sill, and greeted his aunt, who was standing there in expectation of their arrival. Lionel followed with open arms and beaming face, eager to receive the loving welcome which had seldom been wanting on his natal day, and which, bestowed as it was with even more than ordinary tenderness, had on this occasion acquired a new value in his eyes unthought of hitherto.

It was evening. The interview so much dreaded by Lionel had taken place ; and now, all being over, and the party dispersed, he stood in the house of his forefathers, the acknowledged heir of the Tower and lands of Eaglescrag.

Severely had the sensitive youth's self-possession been tried, as, one by one, the proofs of his identity with the infant son of the late Lionel St Clair had been recapitulated by the lawyer in their technical form, and made known formally to the members of the family who were present, and also to old Nurse (who had watched over Lionel from the day he was discovered under the banian tree, till he left Eaglescrag for school). Mrs Harding and Ned, Jem Douglas, Richard *Harding*, and George Carpenter, who, having

hitherto been privately made acquainted with the fact of Lionel's succession, were now set at liberty to divulge the secret. There were still some legal forms to be gone through, but all was now virtually proved and arranged.

Once, indeed, the young heir was greatly tempted to speak his mind indignantly. It was when George Carpenter recounted, with the utmost coolness, his journey with the unconscious infant, his heartless desertion of it when he fancied himself in danger, and his own return, with an untrue statement, to the anxious father whom he had exerted himself to ruin.

Mr Clifford's eye was upon his pupil at that moment, and he saw how Lionel's colour rose, and how firmly his lips were pressed together; but a glance of warning from Tom reminded the latter that it would not be prudent to offend this man, of whose services they were in need; and Carpenter having finished his story, Mr Clifford stepped forward, and holding out an open morocco case, containing a miniature likeness, he said to him, "Have you any idea for whom this picture is intended, Mr Carpenter?"

"Oh, sure, there is no mistake about that," the man replied, turning round to Lionel, who

stood on his right hand ; "it's meant for this young chap. Could'nt be liker to my mind ; only the hair maybe 's a bit darker."

" Well, that is additional proof," returned Mr Clifford, smiling ; "for it is the likeness of the elder Lionel St Clair, taken when he was eighteen—only a year older than Lionel is now."

Various other proofs were brought forward, all more or less convincing, and one paper after another was read and signed, until Nurse, who was all the time surveying Lionel with anxious interest, declared to Mrs Harding that it was enough to "drive the dear child distracted !"

The formal part of the business having at length been gone through, Mr Seyton proceeded to read an extract from Colonel St Clair's will, by the terms of which Tom was appointed guardian to Lionel for the remaining years of his minority, conditionally, however, on the latter's consent.

No doubt had Lionel on such a point. Eagerly he entreated Tom to accept the office, and also to take the vacant place of trustee in the room of Mr Seyton, who wished to resign. With an earnestness and youthful simplicity which brought tears to the eyes of many in the room, he begged

that Tom and Julia would continue to live at Eaglescrag, at least till he came of age, and that Ada, and Eustace, and Emily would always consider it as their home. And then, with a sudden impulse of feeling, he turned towards all present, and said, "I know I am not fit to be the master of Eaglescrag, but I love it better than any other spot in the whole world ; and if I am to possess it, I hope you will all help me to do my best for the place and for you."

And then, as if afraid of his firmness giving way, he drew back behind Mr Clifford, and slipped out of the room by a side-door.

Very favourable to Lionel was the impression left upon the minds of all who remained. Even Julia was conquered at last. "Well, Tom," she said, when all the guests had departed, "your Lionel really is a fine fellow ! I cannot find it in my heart to grudge him Eaglescrag, after all."

And Tom replied, with a gratified smile, "Better late than never, my dear."

In the meanwhile, Mrs Clifford, who had kindly undertaken to break the news to Emily, had been out with her and Violet and Eustace on a long ramble. Emily had had no idea of such a mystery being so close at hand, and threw herself at

first into a paroxysm of distress. But when she returned home, and Lionel met her, and, with all his wonted fondness, assured her the change would make no difference, and that she was never to go away from Eaglescrag unless she liked, the little maiden was comforted, and went off nearly as gay as ever to prepare with Violet for the tea, which all were to enjoy together.

Lionel went slowly up-stairs for the same purpose towards the room which Eustace and he used formerly to occupy together when visitors crowded the old Tower. At the turn of the staircase he met Ada. "I was looking for you, Lionel, dear," she said, laying her hand upon his arm.

"Were you?" he answered. "I wanted you too, dear Ada. Why did you not say anything when I asked you to stay at Eaglescrag?"

Ada half-smiled, then she said playfully, "Because I hate you so, Lionel, that I cannot stay. I am going away."

"Going away! O Ada! why? I never thought you would do that!" said poor Lionel, not perceiving, in his anxiety, that some further meaning lay behind Ada's light words.

She was, however, concerned when she saw that *her manner* had misled him. "You darling old

Lionel!" she said, stroking his cheek as she had been wont to do, and kissing his white forehead, "I would not leave you for anything else. But I am not going far away."

"O Ada!" exclaimed Lionel, with instant comprehension of the truth. "To the manse? Has Mr Morton?—That *would* be nice."

And Ada's deeply-tinged cheeks and conscious smiles, told Lionel that he had guessed rightly.

The old turret seemed to be empty when Lionel entered it. He walked to the window, and stood there for a few minutes looking out. Suddenly a low sound came from the inner room where the boys' beds had stood, and where Eustace still slept. Lionel went to the open door, and looked in, and there, to his surprise, he saw Eustace lying on the bed, with his face hidden.

"O Eu! are you there? Are you tired, old boy?" said Lionel, going towards him. But to his astonishment, Eustace, instead of answering started up, and throwing his arms round Lionel's neck, exclaimed, in a voice which was choked with sobs, "O Leo! Leo! be my brother still! O Lionel! I cannot—cannot, live without you."

In a moment, all Eustace's previous coldness and apparent indifference were forgotten. Lionel

was more moved than he had been at all. He leaned over his adopted brother. "Oh, don't, dear Eustace, don't indeed," he said. "I shall *always* be a brother to you. I can never, never change." And then, forgetful of their approaching manhood, and of their frequent jars and disagreements in days that were past, the two boys clung to each other with all their old attachment; and gradually, under Lionel's soothing words, Eustace was quieted and in part consoled.

Little did he know, however, of the weight which his sudden outburst of feeling had lifted from Lionel's already burdened spirit. Eustace's was a nature which did not readily enter into the feelings of others. Concealed by a hard crust of selfishness and pride, he was yet capable of very deep personal affection towards those he really cared for; and the shock of discovering that Lionel, who had seemed to be more than all the world to him, was not really his brother, had perhaps done more towards opening his eyes to his own deficiencies, than anything else had ever effected; but his thoughts still turned inwards, and he had no idea of the thrill of pleasure which shot through Lionel's generous heart, when the knowledge came to him that Eustace was not altogether

selfish, and that their mutual boyish love might yet be renewed.

A merrier meal than had been known for some time at Eaglescrag ensued. Arthur and his twin-sisters Blanche and Rosa were of the party ; and great amusement was afforded by sundry very tiny glasses of currant wine, in which they were desired to drink the health, first of Lionel, and then of Ada and Mr Morton. Arthur did not understand this latter addition at all. He said he knew it was Lionel's birthday, and that nurse had said he was the *Laird*, and so they were to drink his health ; but he was sure Aunt Ada had nothing to do with that, and Mr Morton was a minister, so why should they drink *his* health to-day ? He would far rather drink " Aunt Dilly's."

" Very well, my dear," said Miss St Clair, beside whom he was sitting. " You and I will drink each other's first, and then Ada and Mr Morton's."

This seeming more satisfactory to Arthur, he joined lustily in the cheer which Lionel and Eustace thought proper to raise, notwithstanding Ada's blushes, and Tom then proposing that Violet and Emily should sing a little duet, the rest of the time passed away very pleasantly in songs and quiet talk.

The moon was at this time at its full, and, after a day of unbroken sunshine, it shone out clear and serene in the starlit sky. After the younger portion of the community had retired to bed, the rest of the party, who, late in the evening, had been joined by Mr Morton, strolled up and down the terrace, watching the reflection of the moon upon the sea, and enjoying the balmy, summer-feeling air. At length Miss St Clair became tired and went indoors; Tom and Mr Clifford, talking low of the events of this day, which after all their anticipations had passed over so peacefully, wandered down to the shore; Ada and Mr Morton—the latter's thoughtful, intellectual countenance lighted up by the glow of intense happiness—turned in the opposite direction, where, under shadow of an avenue of beech trees, they could forget all else in the sense of each other's presence; and Eustace, whose unusually excited feelings had given place to overpowering fatigue, having also gone to bed Lionel found himself alone with Mrs Clifford.

"Oh, dear!" he said, coming to her side on the terrace, and leaning over the parapet. "How glad I am this day is done!"

"Yes, indeed, I daresay," replied Mrs Cliff

kindly. "Mr Clifford has been looking forward to it for so long. I suppose you had no idea of all this before?"

"No, nothing definite. I often, long ago, used to hear things said which I wondered at; but I never thought about it till—till that day, last Easter—after that I saw there was some mystery, but I never guessed what it was. It is all very strange. I could scarcely believe it at first, and yet, Mrs Clifford, when I read the letter—my own father's letter—I did feel somehow as if I belonged to him, and though I am sure I have never been allowed to miss him, I have wished sometimes to-day that I had known him and my mother. I suppose no one knew much of her?"

"I think not, my dear," replied Mrs Clifford, "except that she was of an old Irish family; and, I have always heard, a remarkably sweet and beautiful creature. She was quite young when she married your father. Her family had emigrated to the backwoods of America, where she met him."


Lionel looked up gratefully, but he did not speak for some minutes; then he half-smiled, and said, "It seems very ungrateful, Mrs Clifford, but even, independently of poor Tom, I cannot feel

altogether glad that Eaglescrag is to be mine. I had thought of something so different; and I suppose I can never be a minister now! That must have been what Tom meant," he added, almost as if speaking to himself.

"It is all very trying for you just now; indeed, I can feel for you, Lionel," said Mrs Clifford; "but you are over-tired this evening, and I think you had better not try to look forward at all. Things have been ordered for you very differently from what you could have expected hitherto; and you must trust for the future too. You know your new position may give you as many opportunities of usefulness as if you were indeed a clergyman; and don't you think, my dear, that you will find the promise true: 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be.' You are not, even now, you know, *really* left without a Father."

"No; oh, no! I hope I shall always remember that," returned Lionel; "but it is very difficult to think of it at the right time. Mrs Clifford, I wish you were not going away so soon, Emily likes so much having Violet with her—and I do, too."

"I am very sorry our visit must be so short, *both* for your sake and Emily's, poor child," said



Mrs Clifford ; " but, you see, we are under orders ; but, Lionel, we shall see you again before long. The Laird of Eaglescrag must not forget his second home at Seaview ! "

Lionel smiled brightly, almost for the first time that day. The homely designation, so familiar in Scottish phraseology, seemed to strike upon his ear like a presage of happy years in the future, and to disperse, in some degree, the cloud of depression which had all through this eventful day been weighing down his naturally animated and hopeful temperament.

Mrs Clifford's well-timed words too, simply as they were spoken, sunk deep into the boy's soul, and acted like dew upon the dry and thirsty ground ; the excitement of that period of suspense, and the yet greater excitement of the discovery which concluded it, had naturally distracted his mind from habits of fixed thought, and made him restless and disinclined for reflection ; but, the first feelings of perturbation past, Lionel's better impulses prevailed, and Mrs Clifford's gentle counsel came most opportunely to calm and soothe him, and to lead him back to the only true source of courage and steadfastness.

There was no barrier now to prevent him from residing at Eaglescrag, if he preferred it; but Lionel would not thus abruptly leave the cottage which had so often been his refuge, nor the aunt whose kindness had been the solace of his motherless boyhood. So, after a day or two spent in the old Tower, he stayed on at Woodbank for the remainder of his holidays, working hard in the mornings for his approaching examination, and bounding over to Eaglescrag for his hours of recreation.

Under the first aspect of his new position, many thoughts of discontent had tempted the young heir to wish that his vacation were over, and he himself once more far distant from his home. But he had struggled bravely against all such rebellious feelings, and with so much success that, between energetic study, cricketing and boating with Eustace, rides and rambles and earnest conversations with Tom, the time slipped by so rapidly, that he was quite surprised to find the middle of September arrive before nearly all had been accomplished that he intended.

Many loving thoughts of interest and affection; many hopes, good wishes, and prayers, from humble hearts and homes, followed Lionel on

this occasion, as once again the steamer bore him away from the scenes among which his future lot was apparently to lie. He stood on the deck, gazing on each familiar object, as gradually they receded from his view ; and when the last blue mountain peak had faded away in the distance, a softened smile lighted up his countenance—a look of joy and gratitude and quiet satisfaction—while there arose in his heart a tacit resolution, that whatever else might betide, were health and strength granted him, his highest energies and his warmest sympathies should ever centre in that Highland glen, and be exerted for the best welfare of all connected with it.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

ONE evening in the month of August, five years after the occurrence of the events related in the previous chapter, a number of persons were assembled on the shore below the old Tower of Eaglescrag, looking anxiously across the calm blue waters for the first appearance, not of the usual steamer, but of the white sail of an expected yacht.

Standing in the Cove, with his hat off, his light hair waving in the breeze as formerly, and very little changed by the lapse of time, was Thomas St Clair, with a greatly increased family-group gathered round him.

His wife, more altered perhaps than himself, sat upon a flat rock beside him, a blooming infant of eight months old in her arms; while Arthur, now a fine little fellow of ten years old,



with the twins, Blanche and Rosa, and three other younger boys, flitted about playing with the sand, throwing pebbles into the water, and trying to climb the rocks whenever an opportunity offered of escaping from the supervision of their Aunt Emily, who, herself now a pretty girl of eighteen, seemed nearly as devoted as ever to the service of her nieces and nephews.

A few steps off stood Ada, bright and sunny as ever, notwithstanding her matronly dignity. She leaned on Mr Morton's arm, and a tiny creature in snowy attire trotted after her, apparently quite contented to cling to mamma's dress, without any special notice being taken of her.

Nor was Aunt Lily wanting in the circle. Sitting in a camp-chair, brought down for her benefit, her hair a little more silvery, and her step a little less firm than when last we saw her, she joined in the general watching with all her former interest, and smiled on the gambols of the children with the same cheerfulness as of old.

Close to the shore was a boat prepared for starting ; its prow and stern were adorned with flowers, and a blue flag floated at the helm. Edward Harding and young Colin Douglas were standing in the boat, leaning on the oars ; and

Eustace, his dark, clever, lawyer-like face lighted up with expectation, stood by talking to Henry Delamere, now a tall, young man in clerical attire, in whose quiet, thoughtful aspect it was easy to recognise the orphan schoolboy of Sea-view Lodge. A triumphal arch of magnificent evergreens and flowers stood at the foot of the steps leading to the terrace, and another at the top; while, scattered up and down among the low rocks and shingle, were many of the poorer inhabitants and dependants of Eaglescrag, among whom James Douglas, now a fine-looking young man of five-and-twenty, stood conspicuous—a large bouquet of flowers in his hand, and a merry smile on his lips, as from time to time he went about among a group of boys, who, some carrying musical instruments, and others holding gaily-coloured flags, were evidently under his orders, and then turned to his mother and Mrs Harding, beside whom, Kate's bright eyes were following his movements with a different, though not a less absorbing interest, than she had formerly taken in his boyish exploits.

All at once a loud cheer arose from the men and boys; the yacht was in sight, coming along in full sail; the white canvas glancing in the

sunlight, and wind and tide combining to bring her swiftly onwards.

Eustace and Henry Delamere sprang into the boat, and each taking an oar, the four rowers were soon far on their way towards the vessel.

"All right," said Tom, who was looking through a glass, "there now! they are getting into the boat. Hallo! I hope Eustace is not going to capsize them in his haste to get hold of the laird! Here they come! Now, little ones, be ready with your song!"

And as the boat approached, Arthur and his sisters and little Reginald stood close to the shore, and sang the following simple stanza, composed by Arthur for the occasion :—

"Hail this day, and hail this hour!
Hail the laird of Eagles' Tower!
Bright with youth and hope they come,
Welcome, lady! welcome home!"

"Open wide the ancient gate
To receive our Violet!
Let each hill and rock and dell
Ring with shouts of 'Lionel!'"

The last line was scarcely finished, and received by a clapping of hands from the boat, before the keel grated on the shore, and several boys ran

into the water, to help to steady the little bark, while the passengers alighted.

First came Lionel, as tall as Tom himself now, though still retaining his light agile figure ; he sprang out of the boat : but who is this he has instantly turned to assist in following him ? The slight, graceful form and sweet face have acquired a new charm since last their owner trod these shores ; but the gentleness and exquisite simplicity are still the same that adorned Violet Clifford, and which are now transferred to Violet St Clair, the happy and very youthful bride of Lionel, and the future lady of Eaglescrag Tower.

As Lionel handed her out of the boat, and then looked round at the assembled crowd, his auburn curls clustering round his head, and his handsome face and sparkling eyes bright with the pleasure of return, another vociferous cheer arose, and many murmured whispers of admiration and delight passed between the older persons present.

But Lionel scarcely stopped ; hastily, though very warmly, shaking Tom's hand, and waving a general recognition, he made one bound over the sand, and stood by Miss St Clair's side.

" My dear Lionel ! " she said, " how well you do look ! "

"Don't I, Auntie?" he replied; while greeting one member of the party after another. "Violet and I flatter ourselves we do credit to Swiss mountains; but we were very glad to leave them. I saw nothing there I liked half so much as what I see before me now."

And then Tom gave his arm to Violet; Lionel came after with his aunt; the band struck up the old Scottish air, "Woo'd and married, and a';" and all the others following, they proceeded to pass below the triumphal arch, and to ascend the steps, where, amid the sound of music and the acclamation of voices from below, Lionel St Clair, the master of Eaglescrag, entered his home.

The evening was a very happy one to all concerned, though comparatively quiet after the first excitement of arrival had subsided. The five years that had passed over Lionel's head had improved and strengthened him, but it had not changed his tastes; and his ideas of enjoyment had always been opposed to much noise and hubbub.

And now, when after many an experience different from those of his earlier days, he found himself once more at Eaglescrag, seeing the old familiar faces, and hearing the old familiar sounds, he felt too happy to wish for anything

but to sit quietly among his adopted brothers and sisters, and hear and tell of all that had happened since he last parted from them.

In looking back to the time immediately succeeding the day when he first became acquainted with his own position, Lionel felt that his college life had, almost more than any other contingency, exerted much influence over him. His school experience having been but limited, so far as knowledge of varieties of character was concerned, he had naturally found himself new and untried, more than most, in the world of endless phases of thought and opinion which met him, as he took his place among hundreds of his own age, and found how differently what he had been wont to consider as old established truth was viewed by many of his associates.

Well was it for Lionel, in those days, that he had early begun the battle of life by recognising the existence and the power of evil in his own heart, and had learned to grapple with, and, in some measure, to conquer it there, before he was called upon to enter on a conflict so much wider, and the intricacies of which were so much more subtle and confusing.

To an animated, enquiring mind like his, ever

inclined to reasoning and speculation, there was a great charm in thus measuring his strength in discussions with similarly-constituted minds ; but he had felt the danger too ; and ere he concluded his Oxford career, he was conscious that had he not been armed, as he had sought to be, he too, like many another, might have struck upon the rocks and quicksands of human opinion, and might have been shipwrecked in the encounter.

Even as it was, when he left college after taking his degree, six months before his coming of age, his mind was somewhat disturbed. He had begun to see now that his succession to Eaglescrag must necessitate his relinquishing the idea he had cherished of entering the church ; and being desirous of a change, both of scene and companionship, Lionel begged and obtained leave from Tom to spend some time in carrying out a project he had long had in view—of going on a voyage to Australia, in order to discover, if possible, some more particulars of his father's last days.

The plan had proved entirely successful, both in its effect upon the tone of Lionel's own mind, and also in regard to its original object.

After many fruitless journeys and enquiries, which, notwithstanding their failure, yet afforded him *much* entertainment and interest, Lionel at

length, in a small village far up the country, found what he sought. A little church stood there, amid a cluster of colonists' huts ; and from its minister, an old and simple-hearted man, Lionel heard the mournful story of the lonely stranger who, nearly twenty years before, had come there to die, and whose latest hours had been soothed and cheered by the words of truth and acts of kindness of this now aged pastor.

Lionel was also deeply touched by the sight of a small memorandum-book which the old man produced, saying that the stranger, at the very last, had requested that it might be given to any one who should ever come to enquire about him. The book contained no name, but the writing corresponded exactly to that of the former letter to Colonel St Clair.

And when, on this first evening of his return home, Lionel showed this little faded memento to his Aunt Lily, and told her how he had received it, and also how, ere he left the place, he had erected a marble tablet over his father's grave, perhaps never, in all the years of her devoted tenderness towards her orphan nephew, had she felt more gratified than she was by this trait of *his* deeply affectionate feeling towards the parents *whom* he had never known.

Ever since Lionel went to Oxford, Tom had lived on at Eaglescrag, superintending some building additions which the former had expressed his wish to have made both at the Tower and at Woodbank.

A new arrangement, however, was now necessary ; and in view of the young proprietor's return, Tom had succeeded in obtaining a post of some importance in connection with the business of the county, and had taken some steps towards obtaining another residence, though it did not seem very likely that any such would be found in the immediate neighbourhood of Eaglescrag.

But Lionel had another plan in contemplation, and after several letters had passed between Miss St Clair and himself, it was at length propounded by the former to Tom. This was—that he and Julia should make Woodbank their residence, while she found her home with Lionel at Eaglescrag.

“It is dear Lionel's own idea, Tom,” Miss St Clair said, in speaking of it to her nephew. “I feared I should disturb them—but it will only be for a little while ; and if it is any convenience to you, nothing could make me happier than to return to my old home.”

And so it was settled ; and three of the old time-honoured rooms having been set apart and arranged for the purpose, Aunt Lily and Eliza were

established in a corner of the Tower ; and Lionel's only cause of complaint against them in the future was, that they made so little noise, and gave so little trouble, that he never knew whether they were in the house or not.

Once again Tom and Lionel stood by the stile at the head of the glen ;—It was moonlight, and Tom was on his way to Woodbank. Much pleasant, heart-stirring talk had gone on between them, and now, ere they parted, the conversation had turned to Violet, and to the delight it had given Tom to hear of and to see Lionel's happiness with her.

"It is partly my doing, though, Leo," Tom said, with a playful smile, as he turned to go ; "I set you the example, did I not?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Lionel, in the same tone. Then, still holding the hand he had grasped, he added, more seriously, "But you did me greater service even than that, Tom, when you taught me that 'he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city!'"

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